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The last years of rodin

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The Last Years of Rodin



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AUGUSTE RODIN

THE LAST YEARS OF RODIN

BY

MARCELLE TIREL

TRANSLATED BY

R. FRANCIS

PREFACE BY

JUDITH CLADEL

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PREFACE

HERE is a very curious book about Auguste Rodin.

Everyone knows who Rodin was—the greatest sculptor of the nineteenth century, the supreme artist who revived the decadent art of sculpture and, by the example of his magnificent work, the lofty ideals he held of his profession, and his simple, eloquent speech, created a school of European sculpture, the Modern School. This school is even to-day not as widely known as it should be, but it is none the less destined to renew the glories of France, Poland, and Russia in the domain of plastic art.

Rodin added to these claims to celebrity the imagination and poetic quality of a profoundly original mind, which surprised with its unexpected revelations and childlike innocence. His mentality and his art have exercised an immense influence on all the artists and writers of his time ; they have excited curiosity and led to the writing of enough articles, studies and even books to make a library—and yet without exhausting the subject !

That, in a few words, is who Rodin was. But who

is Marcelle Tirel, whose name stands on the title-page of this, the latest book about the sculptor of the "Burghers of Calais"?

She is a woman of the people, and does not conceal it; a woman who was drawn towards the magnetic personality of Rodin by instinct rather than through her culture, which is very limited, and made the ageing artist the object of an unshakable affection. Marcelle Tirel was fortunate enough to live in the intimate circle of this superman, to be constantly with him during his last years, and to have the opportunity of noting details of a life as picturesque as that of Michael Angelo or Rembrandt—a life made up of long struggles, supreme æsthetic joys and those intimate sorrows which so often mar the existences of the superior beings whose genius is mainly composed of multiplied sensibilities.

Marcelle Tirel followed Rodin in his daily acts and thoughts. She watched him with a tender, amused, and sometimes mocking curiosity. She was the onlooker who saw the results of the intimate conflicts which such a personality creates by confounding the powerful illusions of an imagination which exaggerates everything, evil as well as good, with the humdrum round of daily life. She was astonished, moved, and at times angered by the results of the simplicity, egoism and childishness of the Master, so universally admired but so easily

taken advantage of, the man who, absorbed as he was by his tremendous task, found time to be kind, indulgent and gracious ; the giant of sculpture, at times as irritable and unjust as the Olympian gods he resembled.

The fact that Marcelle Tirel, at the time when she knew Rodin, did not belong, or hardly belonged to the intellectual world, enabled her to observe him without being blinded by the brilliance of his genius or the prestige of his lofty intelligence. It was with a quizzical eye that she noted the conduct of this exalted personality when at grips with the details of everyday life, with people of normal measure, with the sordid rivalries, jealousies, and ambitions of his milieu. This contrast led to a number of singular incidents, which she records with remarkable vivacity and, frequently, in a very amusing way.

At times the tone of her narrative, influenced by its subject, rises to a higher level and becomes really moving, as when she describes the unhappy old age of the poor great man, and the descent of sickness and death on his family and himself. Her natural independence led her, without treating Rodin as an equal, to maintain her customary freedom of speech in her dealings with him. She was not afraid to point out to him his errors and follies, to lecture him and console him with the healthy, vigorous common-sense of the servants of

Molière, combined with the ready “back-chat” of the Southerner.

Rodin listened, remembered what he thought fit to remember, forgot what annoyed him, and—did the same thing again ! These scenes suggest a lion driven by the yapping of a pug dog. Marcelle Tirel originally had the idea of calling her book “*Memories of a Watch-dog.*” I liked this title, which, in its affectionate humility, exactly suggested the situation.

Has the authoress told us the whole truth about Rodin, who had the extremely complex personality of most geniuses ? She does not pretend to have done so. I, who have had the privilege of knowing Rodin from my childhood and studying his character, at the same time as his artistic mentality, can affirm that she was not aware of the rare greatness of the man.

In the struggle he sustained to the last against enemies who thirsted for his defeat and even his death : in his incessant daily trials, the more cruel because of their very triviality : in his illness, and even in the decline of his faculties, he kept the dignity, the discretion and the proud silence of a persecuted sovereign. How often, in his last days, when I saw with grief his physical and mental decline, his isolation from all that he loved, his noble resignation, did I think of King Lear !

At the same time, there is no doubt that Marcelle

Tirel's account gives a true and striking picture of the last years of a man of genius.

“ *Memories of a Watch-dog !* ” There was a time, indeed, after the outbreak of war, when the trusty watch-dog flung out warnings and frantic appeals. Rodin had left all his works to the French Government, a royal gift, valued at several millions of francs. But, in those tragic days, the Government, oppressed by cares and mountainous tasks, gave little thought to artists, however great they might be. It had not yet had Rodin’s legacy officially registered, and this accumulation of master-pieces, the collection of antiques lovingly gathered together, excited the greed of gangs of adventurers and intriguers. Only half in possession of his faculties, without relations or powerful friends to protect him, the illustrious veteran was wholly unprotected.

There was danger that the criminal intrigues I speak of might be successful and sweep away the magnificent heritage ; but Marcelle Tirel, ever on the watch, summoned me to her help. There was still time, and by our combined and strenuous efforts the Government was induced to take charge of and protect its own property.

Has any gratitude been shown for what we did ?

Not long after the death of the Master, Marcelle Tirel came to see me. She held in leash a big sheep-dog, nearly as tall as herself, which followed her

lead with perfect docility. "This is Dora, Rodin's dog," she said to me in her hard Southern speech. "She would have been neglected and perhaps allowed to die, like her master. I asked for her and they gave her to me, but," she added with a sarcastic laugh, "they forgot to give me anything to feed her on."

While I thoughtfully stroked the beautiful creature, whose sad, absent eyes gazed into the void, I looked at the little brown-faced woman before me with her vigorous features, keen black eyes and railing tongue, and I said : " You are a simple, unassuming woman. In your sincerity you acted disinterestedly, without pushing your claims, in a milieu in which disinterestedness does not exist. Your kingdom is not of this world."

JUDITH CLADEL.

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The Last Years of Rodin

CHAPTER I

HOW I CAME TO KNOW RODIN

I WAS barely twenty when my friend Martin, the painter, took me to see the Pavillon Rodin at the 1900 Exhibition. I could not restrain my wonder as I stood looking at "La Pensée" and other figures and groups which seemed to have emerged living from the blocks of marble.

"Rodin," said my friend, "has a bad reputation as a man : but as an artist he is beyond compare and compels our deepest admiration."

Little did I dream then that I was destined to become an intimate member of Rodin's household during the last years of his life.

Just before 1906 I met and spoke to him for the first time. A relation of mine entered the service, as dressmaker, of Madame X., otherwise known

as "the Muse." I went to see her one day at her employer's house at Versailles. Rodin happened to be there, and on Madame X. telling him who I was, he said he would like to see me.

"I have known you a long time, *Maitre*," I said. "Your work has moved me more than that of any other artist."

Bidding me sit down beside him, he asked me in what respect his work moved me, and if I really meant what I said.

"I would just as readily have said the contrary if I thought it," I replied. "I have not yet acquired the art of lying."

Delighted with this frank reply, he began to question me about myself, my life, my work, and my means. I answered all his questions fully and frankly, he studying my face the while.

"Would you sit for me?" he asked. "I have models, but I can never depend on them."

"No, *Maitre*, I have never yet sat for an artist, and I certainly will not sit for you : your reputation is too bad."

Madame X. burst out laughing. Rodin, after a few moments' silence, began to laugh too very heartily.

"I've no secretary," he went on. "I want someone who can help in many ways. You look intelligent. If you like, you can come to me at Meudon. I have much to do ; everything is in disorder. No one pays any attention to my wishes. They don't obey me, and they tell me lies all the time. Can you come to-morrow ? "

"With pleasure, *Maitre*. It is a great honour for me."

The more I knew Rodin, the more I liked him. He was totally ignorant of the material side of life and its ways; his art alone interested him. Nothing was so fascinating as to watch him at work.

He doubted himself, was rarely satisfied, and was sensitive even to the simplest words of praise—which, indeed, pleased him more than lavish compliments.

From 1906 to 1908 all went well. Rodin was doing busts—Mrs. K. Simpson, Lady Sackville,

Lady Warwick, Mr. Harriman—along with other works such as torsos, bathers, etc. We lived more at Meudon than in Paris.

I soon discovered that Thursday was a day of recreation. Rodin used to lunch with the lady of his choice at the *Café de la gare d'Orsay*; or as she would say, at the *Palais d'Orsay*. But one Thursday when Rodin had forgotten his pocket-book in the room there, and his Muse forgot a toilet article, I was sent to fetch them, and the maid who had waited on them told me the rest.

Rodin was undertaking a tour of the French cathedrals. He usually went with Madame X. But one day he elected to take his wife with him. Upon their return, Madame Rodin told me all their adventures.

" You can't imagine how everyone in the hotel stared at me. M. Rodin had written in the visitors' book, ' M. and Mme Durand.' I asked him why, and he flew into a temper. I had to let them call me Madame Durand all the time. What do you make of it? "

"It's only an artist's caprice," I said. "Nothing to worry about. Was he nice afterwards?"

"He never came out of the church. He was there at all hours, writing in notebooks. Look, Madame Martin, here are some he forgot; I brought them back."

Rodin was always tired when he came home to Meudon from those journeys. While he worked he would tell me about his young days, and in this way I gathered details of his life which must be accurate. They certainly differ in many points from the biographies of him which I have read.

CHAPTER II

INCIDENTS IN RODIN'S LIFE AS TOLD BY HIMSELF

"I WAS born in the Rue de l'Arbalète, in the Mouffetard quarter. I played truant a great deal at school. When it came to mathematics, which I never could understand, I made a point of being absent. I only wanted to study leaves, trees, architecture. My father didn't wish me to become an artist. 'They're a good-for-nothing lot,' he used to say. He was a Norman, from Yvetot in South Normandy. My mother came from Lorraine. My father was an inspector of police at the Boudeau Reformatory at Saint Denis.

" You didn't know the house, did you, Rose ? " he went on, addressing his wife. " It was a wooden house opposite the market. It has been gone a long time. In 1871 my father lost his sight completely."

" I remember," said Rose. " It was two years

after your mother died. Auguste¹ was three years old."

When she left her native Champagne, Rose—her name was Marie-Rose Beuret—obtained a situation in a ready-made clothing shop kept by a certain Madame Paul, in the Gobelins quarter. Rodin was then working on the decorations of the Gobelins Theatre; the two caryatids of the doorway are by him. He and Rose met and loved. This liaison of a shopgirl and an out-at-elbows artist's pupil lasted fifty-four years. A year later, in 1866, Auguste was born, in the Maternity Hospital. Rodin's parents took the young mother and child to live with them in the Rue de la Tombe-Issoire.

"I was at Sèvres, wasn't I?" Rodin interrupted his wife.

"Auguste was five years old when you were working at Sèvres," Rose replied.

They argued the point; Rodin humoured her, tried to recollect.

¹ Auguste was Rodin's son. I shall speak of him at length later on.—M.T.

" You're quite right, *mon chat*. M. Lauth was the manager of the factory : I was under M. Jannus."

" Were you ever a soldier, *Maitre* ? " I asked.

" I was and I wasn't. In '71 we were living on the Butte Montmartre, in the Rue des Saules. I was in the National Guard. In the Quarter they used to call me 'the solemn corporal with the wooden shoes.' I didn't like soldiering. You remember, Rose ? That was when I went off to Belgium with my head full of fine plans and my pockets empty."

" And I was earning a shilling a day making shirts for soldiers. Auguste and I lived on that. You used to leave us for months without letting us know where you were. Ah ! you gave me a lot of worry in those days, *ma vieille*."

" I was working at the Hôtel de Ville at Brussels with Paul Van Rasbourg. I also did the 'd'Alembert' at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris."

" When I went to join you, you were doing the 'Bronze Age' and the sapper was your model."

At this reminiscence Rodin grew thoughtful.

"I called it 'Man awakening to Nature,'" he said ironically. "The Salon rejected it—imbeciles! They accused me of modelling a corpse! Ever since then I've hated the Schools of Art and the Institute. I shall always detest those two absurd institutions."

After the Commune, Rodin travelled ; he went to Belgium, to Marseilles, to Cannes, to Strasbourg, to Italy, and elsewhere. In 1878 he helped with the decorations of the Trocadéro. Then he rented a studio at No. 36, Rue des Fourneaux ; Escoula, who did the "Filial Piety" group, worked there, also Millet de Marcilly, Fourquet, the Baroness de Lonlay, who was learning ceramics with L. Gouillhet, Mengue, Mathet, and others whose names I forgot. It was there he did his "Bellona," "Mignon" and "The Creation"; a certain Caillou, who posed for the last, used to do a strong man turn at fairs and was known as "the man with the iron jaw." A peasant from the Abruzzi, one Pignatelli, as handsome as a Greek god, posed

for John the Baptist. A concierge called "Bibi" was the model for the "Man with the broken nose."

"That statue should have brought me fame," said Rodin. "But they did not understand it. I left the Rue des Fourneaux and went to the Rue d'Assas. There I took a pupil, Mademoiselle Camille C. She was very beautiful. She came from Villeneuve-Saint-Pair. Her father was a barrister at C. T. Leaving home to follow her vocation of art, she showed talent from the start and won a third medal—with her 'Grand'-Mère'—an old woman in a goffered bonnet."

Madame Rodin interrupted these reminiscences to remind him of their scenes, and the dreadful life he had led her with his two "establishments." Even now she quivered with rage and jealousy at the recollection of it, while Rodin, quite unmoved, calmly went on drawing.

"You were the best loved, Rose," he said quietly. "The proof of that lies in your presence here."

This was his sole confession and repentance.

During the last weeks of his life, Rodin, holding the arm of Paulin, the sculptor who was doing a bust of him, paused before a terra cotta bust of Mademoiselle Camille.

"She's shut up at Ville-Evrard," Paulin remarked.

"You could not recall a more unpleasant memory," exclaimed Rodin sharply. This old clarity of mind always returned instantly when anyone spoke of the past.

When Rodin's father died in 1883, the family moved to the Faubourg St. Jacques, near the Cochin Hospital. He always mentioned his father with the greatest respect, remaining silent for some time after speaking of him. Auguste left them in 1885, and joined his regiment a year later at Nancy.

Rodin's farewell to his son took this form : "Try and get your stripes at any rate, you block-head : you're no good for anything else ! " and he used to send him twenty francs every month.

He and his wife then went to live at No. 71,

Rue de Bourgogne. Between 1887 and 1891, Rodin did "The Sphinx," "The Man and the Serpent," the Sphinx group, "Spring," "Faun and Woman," "Head of a Woman," "Woman holding her foot," "The Dryad," "Kneeling Dryad," "Lust and Avarice," "Woman and Child in a shell," "The Kiss," "The Man on the Rock," "Three Muses," "Ugolin and his children," "Victor Hugo," "The Winged Republic," and other works. Many of these have been renamed and are known by fantastic titles.

CHAPTER III

RODIN AND THE "MUSE"

I HAVE already mentioned the Muse. Her close friendship with Rodin, which lasted from about 1904 to 1911, is well-known, so there is no reason why I should not speak of it. I shall say nothing that could verge on scandal, but I will remind my readers that she was of American origin and had married.

She was very proud of the name she had acquired through her marriage, also of her social connections, which she always vowed she had sacrificed for Rodin, reproaching him for absorbing her time and attention to the detriment of the many invitations she received. She would talk of dukes, counts, and marquises, and speak of King Edward VII as "my cousin" or "our great friend." Her verbiage on this theme was so incoherent that it often reminded me of Molière's Countess of Escarbagnas.

I could not forgive her for the way she used to

impose on Rodin, who was as simple as he was great ; he never could see the absurdity of her pretentious talk.

" If the King of France came to his own," she used to tell him, " I should have one of the foremost places at Court ; I should be the brightest jewel in the diadem of French intellect and wit."

She wearied us with the recital of countless branches of the genealogical tree of the family into which she had married ; their title was held from Louis XV one day, from Charles X the next. With the aid of an extra glass of whisky she would trace it, straight as the fall of a plummet, right down from Charlemagne.

To the rest of the world, however, it was of Rodin that she would boast, saying that he owed his glory to her.

" Rodin ! I am Rodin !" she said.

Unhappily, her influence on him was most harmful ; she interrupted his work, monopolized his attention, disorganized and weakened his powers, robbing French art of many a noble work.

It must be acknowledged, however, that she worked for him in many ways as hard as any domestic. She washed his face, put on his boots, brushed his hair, dressed him, and put up with his ill-temper without complaint—and then revenged herself on his true friends and admirers. She practically succeeded in cutting him off from almost every acquaintance and keeping him as a close preserve.

She drugged his brain with her inept conversation, and yet she compared herself to Madame Steinheil, of whose beauty, talent and charm she was jealous ; and she used to reproach Rodin for taking possession of her, telling him that with her title she might have aspired to the highest.

One day, when she had been boring him in this way for over an hour, I called him aside.

"Do tell her to shut up, *Maitre*, she's tiring you out !" I said.

Rodin took his hat and overcoat and simply said : "We'll go out ; are you coming, Madame ? "

The Muse induced him to buy a gramophone, with records of church music, ancient chorals and

numerous requiems. It was my task to set the machine working. Rodin sat on the sofa listening, resting his head on his hand, with eyes half closed, in an attitude of intense and solemn attention. Now and again he quivered, and took her hand in his, as though their physical contact were a link between his and her emotions.

After the masses and liturgical chants would come a record of Caruso in *Tosca*, then an Auvergne *bourrée*: the Muse would dance to this, and Rodin would take his "Thoughts" notebook and move into a corner of the drawing-room. The Muse draped herself in a black or green shawl—Rodin called it her *aegis*—and danced. I turned the handle and thought, despite myself, of the successive generations through which that dance had lived, right down to the present day, in Auvergne, that land of evergreen traditions. As a matter of fact, the Muse's performance was a parody of the *bourrée*: her dance, with high kicks, backward and forward contortions, and her scarf ballooning through the air, was more like a burlesque *cancan*.

Instead of being inspired solely with the thought of preserving the traditional interpretation, she seemed preoccupied with her frills and lace, too flimsy for so lengthy an acrobatic performance.

Ten times and more I would wind up the gramophone, while Rodin wrote his notes—on attack, bulls, Minerva, deities. As he filled up a sheet, he would throw it on the floor. Recovering it, I hurried off to transcribe it under the heading “Frescoes.” When he was tired, he would go out by himself in the garden of the Hôtel Biron, to be alone with his dreams.

Then the Muse would slip in between the two open doors of the old Norman wardrobe that served as her buffet and partake of one or other of the liqueurs she kept there. Refreshed and invigorated, she would come back to the gramophone and slip on a record of an American cakewalk, which the machine brayed forth with a whistling accompaniment: she would stagger through the dance, trying to pull me along with her. If she massacred the *bourrée*, it must be acknowledged that her

cakewalk was quite true to nature. Despiau, the sculptor, a fine artist of great talent, must have vivid memories of those gramophone entertainments at the Hôtel Biron ! Madame Emma Calvé once danced a *bourrée* specially to please Rodin : he was much touched, for he often recalled the incident.

One day Rodin came in from Meudon dripping with perspiration. I made him change his linen at once. I was carrying away the white shirt when I noticed some writing on one of the cuffs. I copied it out as soon as he had gone : it was addressed to the Muse.

Dans mes soirées d'études . . . du soin de ma vie. . . la fenêtre. . . . Lorsque je vous ai connue c'était comme une fenêtre ouverte sur des jardins. L'air délicieux et parfumé entrait dans ma chambre. La vie et ma chandelle déjà allumée pour ma soirée. C'est recueilli d'aise et du divin. Cette exaltation m'avait manqué et la reine des Elegances m'avait aimé. Par cette fenêtre le plus pur de mon sang s'est changé en amour.

When Rodin was comfortably settled in his arm-chair at the bottom of the garden, I went up to him.

"For whom was the love-letter I found written on your cuff, *Maître*?"

"Let me see it."

I read him the copy I had made.

"I don't quite remember," he said slyly. "It must have been for Rose."

"Shall I give it to her from you, dear *Maître*?"

He made me read it over again.

"It's too fine for her," he said, and he took the paper from me. "She wouldn't understand it."

I found it again that evening in the garden, where he had dropped it.

The next day the Muse danced the *bourrée* again. She had taken a great deal of *kirsch* as a reinforcement, and tottered and stumbled as she danced ; her face had the besotted, exhausted look natural to her condition. Rodin went gravely on with his jottings.

Quelques reculs . . . puis de fières avancées . . .

elle met l'égide par devant le bras, égide vole autour d'elle, l'écharpe suit. . . . Euterpe toute enivrante ! . . . Je ne ferai que des choses tronquées ? . . . La Bourrée sans buste ? . . . Par raison du ciel, Dieu me l'a-t-il défendu . . . tendue . . . guirlande, bouclier, bras haut, égide, draperie grecque. . . .

I read these leaflets as they came : I could not resist it. I went close up to Rodin and had a look at him to see if he too was—exalted. I related these incidents to Charles Morice as some sort of consolation for Rodin's rudeness ; they grieved him.

"I know the intimate side of Rodin," he said to me. "It is not the most precious side ; but perhaps it is the essential counterpart to the other side, the great side. We never can tell ; we must take people as a whole, the one Rodin with the other Rodin."

The Muse had read in the papers that the *Apaches* were masters of Paris ; this terrified her. The word *apache* affrighted her semi-Parisianized

soul, and she communicated her fears to Rodin ; then she called on M. Lépine, who was then Chief of Police, asking him to send a detective to protect Rodin. M. Lépine recommended a retired detective, and the man came every evening at 6 o'clock to fetch Rodin in the Rue de Varenne—the Hôtel Biron is in the Rue de Varenne—and to accompany him to “Les Brillants,” his Meudon villa ; he then watched through the night in an armchair by Rodin's bedside. But Rodin went further ; he bought a police dog called Dora as an extra watcher. Both at Meudon and in the Hôtel Biron there were revolvers all over the house, on every table. Before all these precautions began to be taken Rodin used to care little enough about any danger. Now he began to be really afraid. My ridicule soothed his fears ; in less than a month he found the detective a nuisance and dismissed him ; we put away the weapons scattered all over the place, and laughed at the whole affair. Afterwards, whenever Rodin mentioned the episode, he remarked how absurd he had made himself.

The artist and the Muse were very free in their behaviour in my presence, but if anyone else was there, they behaved properly. She disliked me ; but Rodin, in spite of everything, was always extremely nice to me. Once, after a special fit of bad humour, when he had not given me a minute's peace, I complained of a headache.

"Run along home at once," he said, giving me a kiss and twenty francs, "and have a good rest."

Another morning I twisted my ankle in crossing the courtyard of the Hôtel Biron, and came in limping to tell the servant. Rodin heard me, ran up, took me in his arms, and laid me down with infinite tenderness on the drawing-room sofa. Then he sent for a doctor.

"Please, please, dear good *Maitre*," I said, quite confused ; "why all that trouble just for a secretary ?"

"You are a woman first and a secretary afterwards," he said. "A woman is sacred."

I won't go into details of all the Muse's petty manœuvres and intrigues. But one day I told

Rodin the truth about her and gave him proofs. Poor Rodin ! He cried over his love like a fifteen-year old schoolboy. We were in the big studio at Meudon. He sank back against the "Ugolin" statue shaking with sobs.

" I am a fool, an unhappy wretch," he moaned.

I did not spare him, but made him see how ridiculous he was, how he was degenerating towards absolute collapse.

" If your brain is that of a young man of twenty, dear *Maitre*," I said, " it is for the creation of great art, not for wallowing in love, which is as false as it is tenacious. Isn't it too sad to think that you, the greatest sculptor of our day, a genius, you whom all men admire, should be becoming a common plaything for a woman ? that you, with your age and white hair, should think yourself an Adonis simply because your imagination is a living fire ? "

I spoke of his wife, his old comrade, so simple, so pure, in her love for him, her only lover. I preached my little sermon and he heard me out, still on his knees, his face furrowed with suffering.

I was wounding his pride most of all, but that was his weak point, and I counted on the reaction that would come after reflection.

The Muse was waiting for him at the Hôtel Biron, and the trunks were packed, all ready for a fresh jaunt, which meant more loss to him pecuniarily and to his art.

"There is only one course for you," I counselled him boldly. "Go away with your wife at once, and look ahead instead of back. Have a nice little journey with her, and come back cured."

Still a little cowardly, he attempted a few objections ; but I stood firm. He came out, accompanied me for a little distance, and then left me, his mind quite made up. An hour later he left for Normandy with his faithful Rose, and they stayed there several days. Upon his return he sent for me ; but before going to see him I wrote him a letter :

"**MY DEAR Maitre,**

I am sure this letter will find you in good health, both physically and morally, and that you

have really benefited by our talk before you went away. You must forgive me if the truth was painful ; I did my duty and think it a good deed. I hope you will return to your work with renewed energy. Your country and your friends, whether they be great or humble, await fresh masterpieces from you, and it is only through your work that you will regain your soul in peace.

Work, dear *Maitre*, work ! God will give you strength, and through your work you will win over even the hearts of your enemies."

And indeed he was quite changed, full of courage and vigour, ready for anything, and, above all, anxious to see the friends he had forsaken. I stayed with him, would not leave him. Charles Morice wrote : " You are a fairy ! " Rodin said : " You have done a noble deed ; you have saved me."

The forsaken Muse was wild with rage. She hurled threats at me. Then one day she appeared

at the Hôtel Biron, swathed in black veils, flung herself at Rodin's feet and began a dramatic scene, wailing and sobbing. Rodin quietly rose, put down the drawing he was working on, called the servant, pointed to the crouching figure of the Muse, and said : " Show Madame out ! " She threatened him, but I ran up. " Don't be afraid, *Maitre* ; if she touches you, I'll smash her face for her ! "

She went. The comedy had been a failure. Charles Morice wrote an article about it all in *Le Gaulois*.

A certain M. de B. came to see Rodin about it. He was refused admission. One of her relatives came and begged Rodin to take her back. I escorted him out of the house myself. But he wrote to Rodin ; and the Muse wrote to Rodin. And Rodin, without telling me, sent her a thousand francs from time to time with a sigh. Now and again regrets attacked him.

" I've wasted seven years of my life. That woman has been my evil genius. She took me for

a perfect fool and people believed her. I shall never shake off that nightmare ! ”

At such moments Rodin was really quite childish. I used to comfort him by talking about his wife.

One morning he came in from Meudon in a great rage. “ I’ve just found out,” he said point-blank, “ that she was a circus rider, and that she thrashed her husband into marrying her.”

I knew of whom he was talking and simply replied :

“ It’s probably a lie : in any case it’s no business of yours.”

“ I believed all those lies she told ! It’s true, she used to ride very well ; but what couldn’t she do ? ”

“ Really, *Maitre*, why on earth do you worry about all that nonsense at this particular moment ? There’s your poor model on the table, freezing to death.”

He hurried into the studio, where a frail young girl was posing. He had forgotten all about her ; the poor thing was quite naked and was shivering.

Rodin gave her fifty francs and some sweets—but I shall be talking about his models later on.

One day, when we had been discussing certain matters in his presence, he said to me : “ Suppose I had beaten her, do you think she would have loved me ? ”

“ My poor dear *Maitre*, one blow of your fist would have nearly killed her. You don’t know your own strength ! ”

For I had seen Rodin only the day before, in spite of his seventy-three years, carry a bronze cast of his “ Bellona ” and put it on the top of a lofty piece of furniture, apparently without the least effort. I must admit that I had had some most painful moments during the reign of the Muse. In 1911, for example, she and others had managed to keep Rodin away from his wife, from his friends, and from all who might have interfered with a certain plan. One day I had to force his door to go to him. I had been told that I could only see him if I promised to tell him how well he looked.

I gave the promise so as to gain my end. I could hardly recognize him, depressed, tired, aged, his forehead streaming with perspiration, his lip drooping ! He had a bowl of some steaming decoction in front of him. In his left hand he was holding a little antique torso, caressing it, lifting it and lowering it with gleams of admiration in his dimmed eyes. I watched him without a word for a few minutes ; then I could keep silence no longer, but burst out.

"*Maitre*, dear *Maitre*, you're ill ! You look dreadfully ill ! For heaven's sake, what's the matter with you ?" I could hardly keep back my tears.

"I'm always thirsty," he whispered. "But don't say a word !"

"Don't drink that, anyhow," I advised, pointing to the bowl. "I will come back tomorrow."

He seemed happier, and kissed and thanked me.

I ran to Dujardin-Beaumetz in the Rue Drouot and told him what I had just seen. The next day the Under-Secretary for Fine Arts came and took Rodin back to his wife at Meudon. The doctor

ordered him a milk diet, and I went to see him every day.

"Ever since I've taken to milk," he told me a few days later, "I've been free from that irritating thirst and the nasty taste I had in my mouth."

He stayed several weeks at Meudon. But one morning he rebelled against all our good advice, and went back to the Hôtel Biron.

And that leads me to the subject of the Rodin Museum. As for the Muse, we shall come across her again, more than once.

CHAPTER IV

RODIN AND HIS MUSEUM : THE INSTITUTE

FOR a long time Rodin had contemplated establishing a Museum for his works. He had not as yet, however, thought of the Hôtel Biron. It was Mademoiselle Judith Cladel who suggested the house and took the initiative in the whole affair. The Government, or the Domains Department (I am not sure which) had given him notice to quit the house he occupied in the Rue de Varenne ; he was therefore looking for another place. What Rodin wanted was a town house that had belonged to one of the old families, built in a style that would harmonize with his works—Renaissance, or Louis XIV. An antiquary who had long had dealings with him was entrusted with the task of finding the house required. He found it, but it needed restoring. It was the Hôtel Tugres, situated, if I remember rightly, close to the Rue St. André-des-Arts. Rodin went to see it, but came back disappointed.

"In the old days," he remarked to me, "the kings used to house their great artists. The fools who govern us to-day pitch them into the street."

"Why not make your Museum at Meudon? There you have the open sky, the view, the atmosphere—all you need, ready to your hand."

"It's too far off. No one would visit it. I want people to go and study there."

"And yet there's the antique colonnade, the Issy portico, the terrace garden; all that, with your antiques and your statues everywhere, would be beautiful. Workmen would surely go."

"I want the blacksmiths to go there," he said bitterly.

This sneer was intended for the Institute. Rodin's hatred for it amounted almost to a mania. If the dog limped, he blamed the Institute. If he stumbled over a bramble, it was the Institute! In fine, the Institute was his pet aversion, his bugbear; I believe that if he could have seen himself dying, he would have accused the Institute of having killed him.

And no wonder. At the Salon de la Nationale they had put a card with the inscription, "Cast after Nature" against two plaster torsos exhibited by him. It was a spiteful trick. I had actually seen them modelled, and I knew the originals. Indignant articles appeared in the Press calling upon Rodin to protest. He listened to everybody and gave them all the promises they asked for. But all he did was to withdraw the torsos. When they were brought back to the Hôtel Biron, Rodin walked all round them, caressing them with the tips of his fingers, as though he were trying to find a fault somewhere. Then for quite an appreciable time he stood still, without speaking. I went up to him to try and distract his attention, and saw tears in his eyes.

"That's the Institute!" he said. "The Institute had that card put there."

One day Rodin arrived at Meudon looking very distressed. I asked if anything was wrong. At first he resented my questions, but I persisted. I knew that he found comfort in confiding his troubles.

"The Government refuses to let me have the Hôtel Biron—after having given it to me," he said sadly. "They won't vote the credits. They didn't understand that I would pay all the expenses."

"Never mind ! You'll make your Museum somewhere else. The Government will change and the next will be better disposed towards you. Ministers are like the phœnix, they rise anew from their ashes."

"Then I shall never have Biron ! Let's go away ! Let's go to Meudon. I want to walk about in the open. Let's leave Paris for a few days."

On arriving at Meudon Rodin set to work at once. He began touching up plaster figurines, talking all the time. But what he liked best was hearing other people talk while he worked. He made a fine mess both of his overall and of the floor. Madame Rodin, delighted to have him with her, smiled at him and talked about cooking.

"Fish, cabbage soup, and bacon, that's what I like best, Rose ! It may not be very refined," he said to me, laughing, "but the peasants eat nothing else ; and they are closer than any to

God. And you, *mon chat*," he went on, to his wife, "you've got your own special cooking—vegetables, cheese, milk." She made no answer. Their tastes in food were alike.

Now and again, while he was working, his thoughts returned to the Government and the people who cared so little about the wonderful gift he was offering them. "They're idiots, fools : and they don't know anything about art. But then it's such a decadent age ! "

To turn his thoughts from the subject, I began talking about order and method, a well-loved but thorny theme that ended in bitter reproaches I did not deserve !

"When I was a young man," said Rodin, "I always lost my tools. I put them in the wrong place and could never lay hands on them when I wanted them. My poor Rose ! What you used to have to put up with on that score ! "

"I've forgotten all that, *ma vieille* ; there, there, go on working ! I'm happy just to have you near me.". She ran out quickly to hide the tears in her eyes

" Give me my tools . . . no, not that—those wooden points. You're cunning, and you can see I'm happy ! Don't take advantage of me because I'm happy."

" Work, dear *Maitre*, work ! It's so interesting to watch you create ! It's health and life for you, creating ! "

When Rose came in again, he said, very kindly : " I like obedient women. They're obedient to-day."

When lunch was ready, he went in with the two of us, holding his old wife's hand. But we were not a happy party, eating in silence. In the afternoon he had a fit of ill-temper, cursing and swearing, clenching his fist and calling the Ministers "*apaches in white ties* ! "

Towards evening, after a walk in the garden with his wife and myself, he said to her :

" After all, *ma Rose*, I should be a fool to give away all our wealth ! "

" Good-night," he said when we reached the steps of the house, " I shall see you to-morrow. I've some important writing to do."

He shut himself up in the big drawing-room, and next morning I found the following will on the table :

“I, the undersigned, Auguste Rodin, being of sound mind and body, do give and bequeath to the State all my works and antiques, subject to the State paying a sufficient pension to Mademoiselle Marie-Rose Beuret, who has lived with me all my life. Should the State refuse to do this, I give my works to various museums in other countries, and I beg my friends, Octave Mirbeau, Bigand-Kaire, and others to see to it that my wishes are carried out.”

Rodin was with his wife when I took this document to him. He had forgotten all about it, and they were talking of their wealth, about money and honours.

“I have riches beyond compare,” Rodin was saying.

They bowed their heads, almost bewildered, devout in attitude as the peasants in Millet’s “Angelus.” Then they embraced gently, in their

need of united strength to bear the burden of that consummation so long awaited, so late realized . . . their fortune !

The State and the Ministry of Fine Arts did not know what riches Rodin possessed, or how, in spite of the sharpers who used to cheat and rob him, he kept on spending vast sums on his collection of antiques. The Syndicated Chamber of Paris Antiquaries valued this collection at four million francs !

Rodin was very wealthy, and became more so every day. At that particular moment it would have been hard to say what his fortune amounted to ; he had money in many banks, as well as abroad. And it would have been very easy for him to have lost it all.

Rodin's most persistent idea was to give his works and his collections to France. And when at last he made the gift, even if his brain could no longer grasp the meaning of the legal phrases in the deed, those who accepted that gift had no occasion for scruples ; for this noble action was a joy to the great Frenchman, who gave his country his whole-hearted love.

CHAPTER V

RODIN AND MADAME RODIN

RODIN always showed an incomprehensible fear in the presence of any kind of suffering. He could never speak of death without a shudder.

“ I am in such a state of distress beside a death-bed,” he once told me, “ that I have a wild longing to say something cruel. When my friend Carrière, whom I loved with all my heart, was dying, I could say nothing but foolish things of which I’m ashamed to this day, yet I was suffering acutely. Ah ! if only I were a weaker man and able to shed tears ! The tears of others drive me out of my mind, and I become brutal.”

It was quite true. His fear of the sight of suffering made him rage against Madame Rodin when she coughed right through the night, as she sometimes did. He grew angry and stormed, telling her she prevented him from sleeping. She said he was selfish. Poor man ! It was really his

horror of suffering, which he could not relieve, that upset him in this way.

He and his wife would quarrel over the merest trifle. Both possessed uncertain tempers, and they sulked like a couple of children. They were ashamed of themselves, but neither would give in. As these fits of temper became chronic, they devised a highly original cure. The first to get in a temper and aggravate the other must hand over a hundred-franc note as a penance. I was to be the judge, and to be truthful, I must admit that it was always Rodin who began. He would fly into a rage for nothing at all. His wife sat unmoved, a sly look in her eye. One day Rodin had forgotten the compact ; he only remembered it when he got to the Hôtel Biron, and he sent the servant to pay his fine. We used to laugh about it and call it a "fine for breach of the peace."

Once when Rodin had not been to the Hôtel Biron for two days—it was early in October and he had a slight cough—I went to Meudon to see what he was doing and found him in full blast.

They were wrangling about the housekeeping money. Rodin was shouting, laying down the law, vowing that a hundred and fifty francs every fortnight was quite enough, while his wife was insisting that she ought to have five hundred francs a month. They never stopped their quarrels for me, but on this occasion, as soon as Rodin saw me at the door of the little dining-room, he came forward holding out his hand, quite forgetting the dispute.

" You've done well to come," he said. " We're staying here. Have you brought the letters ? "

He then handed a thousand francs to his wife, and we went into the big studio. As he arranged the draperies of the " Ugolin " group, he said to me in a low voice :

" Go and tell Rose I'm not angry. I can't give her back her health, but I would like to make her the happiest of women."

I gave her his message, and after lunch, which, by the way, always lasted till two o'clock, Rodin had the carriage brought round and took us for a drive.

He did not speak of Paris, but devoted himself to his wife, called her *mon chat* all the time, and asked her every five minutes if she were quite comfortable.

Sometimes Rodin would be charming from morning till night. But this was so rare that his wife seemed to fear such periods of calm even more than his rages. On Sunday she was down in the kitchen cooking the meal herself. Rodin kept going downstairs to see her, or chatting from the top of the staircase.

“Ready yet, *ma fermière* ?”

“Another five minutes, *ma vieille*,” she would call back.

Returning to his work, he would forget all about the five minutes, and had to be scolded before he would come to table. When he was at work, nothing else existed.

When at last he came, his hands were covered with plaster. Rose waited on him herself and would not let the maid come upstairs. One Sunday, when she had been up and down stairs a great many times, he said at length :

" You sit down ; it's my turn to wait on you now."

Her expression changed to one of sulkiness, and she turned to me exclaiming with petulance : " Oh, Madame Martin ! A man like him wait upon a poor peasant woman like me ! I'd rather eat on my knees."

Rodin was displeased at having his services refused. As he jumped up from the table hurriedly, she forgot to bring his coffee, and for this he kept reproaching her all the afternoon. She wept as though she had committed a crime. I scolded Rodin mildly.

" My wife loves me," he answered, " because she admires me. If she didn't, she would hate me." And he added to himself, " She'd be quite right, too ! "

A few minutes later the poor woman said to me, " I've only one pleasure, to see him happy."

How often have I comforted her in some imaginary grief ! We talked confidentially, but stopped if we saw Rodin coming, as he disliked our

talking secrets. If he was afraid of what I might reveal to his wife he was wrong. I would never have said a word to harm anything so charming and sincere as the mutual love which underlay their extraordinary attitude to each other.

Madame Rodin was very jealous, and never tried to hide it. She had a mania for posing as a victim when people came near her, especially if they flattered her. As a matter of fact, Rodin had never really loved anyone else.

In spite of this, he always assumed a certain air of superiority which made her afraid of him. One afternoon she showed me a bag of gold she had saved.

"That's for him," she said. "I never touch it. If he were ruined, I should give it to him ; then he'd be able to begin over again."

The idea of "beginning over again" was always at the back of their minds. They never could realize that their life was drawing to a close.

Another time, when Rodin was working at the mask of Madame Hanako, who was sitting for him,

Céneen 9, châlon 8 et
de l'orangerie.
Je devais avoir été à
l'aut. lors de l'explosion
que nous avons
dans ma poche
des deux dernières
journées à Paris
à l'opéra, à l'opéra,
et dans les rues
au plus de temps
je suis dans une état
de plus en plus proverbe
de ne devoir survivre, dans
les opéras, à l'opéra,
des moments dans lesquels
je devais mourir
à la fin, j'étais tellement
malade - renversé
je foudroyé, mort.

Je trouvai et
demanda que tu m'ailleras
à la campagne pour
te donner la réplique de
toute chose, mais que
tu n'es pas dans la
position de venir, ou que
tu n'as pas le temps
de venir, ou que
tu n'as pas le temps
de venir, ou que

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER FROM RODIN TO HIS WIFE



his wife brought him a purse of ten-franc pieces and put it in his hand.

“ There, that’s for you, Auguste.”

Rodin put the purse in his pocket without a word.

“ It’s a bit of money saved,” she went on.

“ Some day, when you’ve nothing left . . .”

He took the purse out of his pocket and retorted :
“ What do you expect me to do with this ? There’s so little of it.”

She burst out crying.

“ Really, *Maitre*, ” I said, “ you are very unkind. Why, it’s quite an inheritance she’s giving you ! Poor Madame Rodin ! Come, give her a kiss ! ”

Madame Hanako got up. Rodin kissed his wife kindly and said :

“ Forgive me, *mon chat* ; when I’m working, you know I hate being disturbed.”

“ Do you know, Auguste, I’ve kept the first bag of sweets you gave me, and the six Bohemian glasses you bought me forty-five years ago. They are my sacred relics.”

“ Oh ! let’s have a look at them.”

As she went upstairs to fetch them Rodin called out :

" Bring the glasses too ! I can afford to drink out of Bohemian glasses to-day ; in the old days they were too grand for us."

Rodin was greatly moved.

" What touching simplicity," he said as she went out of the room. " My poor wife ! Those little things give me so much pleasure, but I shall never say so to her ; she might change."

When Rose brought the glasses Rodin gazed at them for a long time. " How long ago it was," he murmured. Then taking her head in his two hands, all covered with clay, he gave her a hearty kiss, but said nothing. He drank out of the Bohemian glasses. The wine was from the cellar of the German Emperor.

A tawny cat, of which Madame Rodin was fond, jumped on to Rodin's knee and rubbed its head against his beard.

" Look," said his wife, " the cat is the same colour as your beard was when you were young.

I wonder if he's as big a lady-killer as you were?"

"I behaved as a man does," he retorted sharply.

"Red men," said Madame Rodin to me, "are either very good or very bad."

"I was often told that," remarked Rodin, "when my hair was still red. Yet I never did any harm."

"I don't suppose you remember," muttered his wife.

Rodin left the room.

At Meudon all the servants were called "Monsieur." One day at lunch, when the coffee was stronger than usual, Rodin said to his wife :

"Rose, *mon chat*, try and find out who made the coffee to-day."

Madame Rodin got up to go to the kitchen, but he stopped her and said in a whisper, with many gesticulations :

Look here, I'll tell you how you can manage it. Go into the kitchen and say, quite casually—we don't want to hurt M. Griffeuilles' feelings if it

was M. Julien who made the coffee, you understand —just say, ‘ Who made the coffee to-day ? ’ If it was M. Julien, say nothing more. If it was M. Griffeuilles, then say, ‘ M. Rodin found it very good.’ ”

She was just going down when he called her back.

“ When you find out who it was, don’t say anything at all. Only on Sunday we’ll have it made by the one who made it to-day.”

He was as pleased as if he had just arranged some big business transaction, and while he was sipping his coffee, he talked to me about his wife’s loving and tender obedience.

Food was a favourite topic with the sculptor. Even when Octave Mirbeau was there, conversation about succulent dishes came in freely among the talk on art and literature. “ People who know good food,” Rodin would say, “ are the truest friends of art.” He generally spent two hours over lunch, eating large mouthfuls very slowly and noisily, as one who thoroughly realized the value of good food.

At Meudon, Rodin was popular with everyone ; in the Rue de Varenne he was less so ; the accumulation of luxury there rather turned his head, and he spoke to his servants as if they were navvies, whereas the same servants at Meudon were Monsieur and Madame.

"I am a great man, and don't forget it," he shouted one day to his valet. "I wish you to obey me and not answer back !"

In revenge the man scorched the whole of one side of Rodin's head while dressing his hair.

Rodin had an English valet for a considerable time. He never could remember the man's name ; so he christened him "My Lord." It was the funniest thing in the world to see the Englishman's face, perfectly impassive, when Rodin was shouting out "My Lord, come here ! My Lord, where the devil are you ?"

Rodin had bought from Hébrard, the art founder, a clock designed by Desbois. Every time he passed the table on which it stood, he used to pause and walk round, admiring it.

"What an artist!" he would exclaim. "What a great artist! what purity! what fine honest work!"

And when Desbois one day was thanking him for having paid five thousand francs for it—far too much—Rodin answered :

"That's less than its proper price, *cher ami*. If I were rich, I would have paid much more."

He bought a nude from Renoir for twenty-five thousand francs. M. Herriot had coveted the picture, and when he saw it at Rodin's, he said to the artist : "I'll buy it from you for thirty thousand."

"I've made a good bargain," said Rodin greatly pleased. "The torso of this young girl is sheer sculpture ; it's a marvel." And he would stand alone in front of the painting looking at it for a quarter of an hour at a time.

Having to go one day to an official reception at the Elysée, the sculptor began to dress for it quite early in the morning. He had just been made a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, and letters

of congratulation were pouring in from all over the world. When he saw the pile, he was delighted; but all he did was to sign a few visiting cards by way of thanks. Just as he was leaving I said : “*Maitre*, don’t forget your decorations.”

He took various little cases out of a drawer, and one by one I handed him the medals. He looked them over and put them down on the table. When we came to the Grand Officer’s star, he turned it over every way, then asked me :

“ Where do you put that ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Round your neck, on your chest, or lower down ? ”

I repeated that I did not know.

At that moment the floor polisher, an attendant in the Versailles Museum, came in, his beeswax, rags and brushes in his hand.

“ Perhaps our friend here will know,” said Rodin.

He asked the man about it, very affably. The polisher dropped wax, brushes and rags, took the star in his dirty hands, and placed it on his stomach,

just over the liver, saying with an air of complete assurance :

“ That’s how it goes, M. Rodin. I’ve seen such things at the Versailles receptions, and the Ministers wore that thing just there ! ”

Rodin tried it, but was not satisfied with the effect ; he became worried. He took up the decorations one after the other and put them down again. I could not restrain my laughter, and it set Rodin laughing in turn. Gathering them all up, he stuffed them into his trousers pocket, saying :

“ I’ll get the cloakroom attendant at the Elysée to put them on for me.”

A week later Madame Rodin gave me the collection wrapped up in tissue paper.

“ Take all those pieces of metal back to Paris. M. Rodin has no use for them ; you’d better give them back.”

She told me how one day when they were young and living in the Rue des Saules on the Butte Montmartre, Rodin, who had not been home for

several days, came in very penitent and full of promises.

"Rose, you must cook a nice little dinner for to-night—at seven o'clock—seven sharp ! After dinner, I'll take you out somewhere."

Rose hurried off and began preparing her feast, singing for happiness at the return of the prodigal. . . . It was three weeks before she saw him again. Though now she could have afforded to laugh, the poor woman wept at the recollection of her unhappiness.

CHAPTER VI

RODIN'S ABSENT-MINDEDNESS

It will easily be inferred from all I have said that Rodin was absent-minded and had no sense of order or method. This involved a phenomenal amount of disorder, especially in his correspondence. Letters that called for an immediate reply remained buried in his pockets, unopened. He changed his clothes sometimes three times a day, wearing one suit at the Hôtel Biron, another at Meudon, and so on. Weeks after he had put some garment on one side, he would find in the pockets letters which he thought had only just arrived and now were of no use.

One morning, when I was alone at the Hôtel Biron, he came in from Meudon in great excitement.

"Quick, quick. Get my clothes. . . . The maid isn't here. I'm going to the funeral of my

old friend, Dr. Bigot. I've just received the telegram. It's at midday."

As I helped him to dress, he asked for his notebooks and some sharpened pencils.

"While I'm following the procession," he explained, "I'll jot down some thoughts on friendship."

He hurried off, leaving the telegram on my desk. I took it up and found it was dated eight days ago. His friend had been buried a week. Two hours later, when he returned, I had never seen him so gay.

"Just think of it," he exclaimed, "I arrived at the house and saw no procession. So I said to the driver : 'I'm late : go in the direction of Père Lachaise and join on to the first funeral procession you meet.'"

The chauffeur did as he was told, and Rodin, in the taxi, wrote away at his "thoughts." When they reached Père Lachaise, he got out and followed the crowd. At the graveside he recognized nobody, and no one knew who he was. This incognito

episode and his mistake of the date delighted him, for he hated going to funerals, especially those of friends.

"So I have had a nice little rest and been saved from sad reflections," he confessed.

He was particularly cheerful all day. One of his models came for a sitting ; he didn't remember telling her to come, so he gave her twenty francs and sent her away. He then plunged into literature, and scribbled till nightfall in a notebook which he lost when he was catching his train.

At Meudon, Rodin would play at farming. He had bought an estate, or, rather, a piece of land which had originally belonged to a convent ; on it was a tumble-down hothouse, its roof all broken in. He offered the property to his wife as a present, and, sending for carpenters and masons, explained that when they put the roof in order, they were to use weather-worn slates, not new ones. The workmen objected that weather-worn slates could not be supplied by the trade ; only the

weather could produce the effect he wanted, and they must be new slates.

"But can't you stain them so as to hide the patching?" persisted Rodin. The men argued, and Rodin grew angry and sent them away.

"I won't be a party to a work of restoration," he said. The hothouse is more dilapidated than ever now.

One day I had forgotten to shut a door. Rodin made a dreadful scene and ended by saying :

"You don't seem to realize who you are working for! My health ought to be your unceasing care; I'm a man of importance!" And there and then he gave orders to the servant to follow him everywhere, shutting all doors behind him.

He was always complaining of people's untidiness, but he himself held the record, and I told him so.

"It's true," he confessed. "I've always been very untidy. My poor mother often scolded me for it. But then some people waste their whole lives in putting things in order. The Anglo-Saxons are great at it, but they achieve nothing in

art. Yet I like order, measure, balance. It's a form of sincerity."

Half-an-hour later I found lying about the garden sheets of paper covered with notes, dropped while he was walking about.

One afternoon Rodin arrived at the Hôtel Biron in a tearing hurry and a very bad temper. Noticing three armchairs out of their place round my desk, he began abusing me for untidiness. I rose to put the chairs in their places. All at once he calmed down and stopped me.

"There are no little things in life," he remarked. "Those chairs, where they are, look as if they were continuing a conversation. What do you suppose they are talking about?"

He waved his hand vaguely.

"About the past, no doubt," I hazarded.

"No, you stupid! They are talking of the people who've sat in them. The first chair is saying: 'I've had fat people'; the second, 'I've had thin people'; the third 'I've had bony people, flabby people, plump people, angular

people.' Perhaps a king sat in that chair," he added, and walked away. Another time he found my pencil lying across my penholder. He put them straight, side by side, and said : "Heavens ! What an awful state your room must be in ! "

One morning I gave him two bundles of his notes ; one lot had been corrected, the other was to be looked over. Rodin took a bundle in each hand.

" Which is the corrected bundle ? " he asked.

" The one you've got in your right hand."

He took a couple of steps, then held out the bundle in his left hand.

" It's this one, isn't it ? "

" No, *cher maître*, the one you've got in your other hand."

He changed them from hand to hand several times, then came back, put both lots together in the same drawer, and called me an " idiot " for my untidiness.

CHAPTER VII

PROFESSIONAL MODELS—AND OTHERS

RODIN often posed his models by candle-light, carrying the candlesticks about to study the effect of the flames upon the marble. In his long loose studio gown, with a candlestick in either hand, pacing with short steps through the big dark rooms of the Hôtel Biron, he looked like a sorcerer. He modelled the lights and the shadows and went into ecstasies. The tireless efforts to express his vision of art which distinguished him from the start of his career to the close of his life made one forget the shortcomings of a man ignorant of all worldly ways and habits ; one only thought of him as the sincere and whole-hearted searcher striving to penetrate the mysteries of art.

Rodin had a certain degree of affection for some of his models, especially for one young woman ; she was the wife of a talented artist, and posed only for Rodin and Desbois. He heard one day that

she had undergone an operation for appendicitis ; he was loud in lamentation. " Those doctors are butchers," he declared. " This newly-invented disease of theirs may have destroyed that supple perfect body. They mangle and hack, they cheat and murder Nature as though they had a right to do so. Progress indeed ! What do you call her disease ? "

" Appendicitis, *Maitre*."

" Ah, yes, appendicitis. They've opened up that young body which they ought to be worshipping, to take out a bit of guts. It makes me sick to think of it ! In the old days they usen't to make mince-meat of people as they do to-day. I've a horror of doctors and doctors' stuff. My poor wife is killing herself with syrups that she doesn't really need. For all our age we're robust, solid old folk. If I had listened to the doctors, I should have been dead long ago."

Rodin must have been unusually moved to talk about dying ; he would have been greatly annoyed had anyone told him he was an old man, and still

more so if they had talked to him about his death.

"Nothing is so amusing," he said to me one day, "as a model on her first visit. She takes off her clothes in fear and trembling, as if she had caught some infection of modesty from her other studios. Is my reputation as bad as all that? Or is it that they are afraid of my criticism, afraid I shall send them away? I often tell them they're beautiful. All women are beautiful to me because they are a part of Nature. I have sometimes told them of their own individual beauty; and then when they left, they told everybody I had said they were marvels of loveliness! Consequently some of the other studios laughed at my taste. The ancients took women of thirty to forty years of age as their models. It is then that they are at their highest and most vigorous power of expression, in the plenitude of their strength. The flesh is firm, the modelling at its fullest development. A young girl is a poor thing in comparison, her flesh and muscles too often eaten up by anaemia, proving the

degeneracy of this decadent age of ours. They talk about the fragile beauty of youth. Yes, but there's no stuff in the flesh—it's mere lace."

M. Clemenceau sat for his bust. Rodin was afraid of him, for somehow he always seemed to be scoffing at the sculptor, but when he left, Rodin let himself go and said what he thought.

"I had promised with much pleasure to do a bust of him. The subject was worthy of me. We are of equal strength in our different lines. It's quite a short time since I came to understand politics ; they scared me at first, and then, all at once, I grasped their mechanism. And it's the simplest thing in the world. Clemenceau has got politics in his blood ; but he understands nothing about art. He was born a fighter, and a fighter who attacks first. But he is aggravating in his ways of thought. He loves interminable discussions, and he has the sense of humour of a street arab. He supplies all the talk when we are together, and I don't attempt to argue with him. If I did, we should devour each other."

"Did he criticize his portrait?" I asked.

"At every touch of my thumb on the clay, I could feel that he was displeased ; he had a pitying smile on his face."

"Perhaps he hasn't enough patience to sit well, *Maitre*."

"His sneering expression worried, almost paralysed me. When the first stage was finished, he spoke to me as if I had been an apprentice ! 'That's not me at all : it's a Japanese you've made, Rodin ; I won't have it !' I was expecting it. I've never had much luck with my busts. Desbois thinks very highly of my Dalou ; myself I prefer my Victor Hugo."

"And the Balzac?" I returned.

"The Balzac? Very few people have understood it. It's a statue, it isn't a portrait. I was told Clemenceau possessed a very curious and interesting collection of Japanese masks. He was so furious at finding in these masks the likeness to himself as brought out in my portrait that he got rid of the whole collection. It appears that his wife induced

him to refuse to let me do his portrait. I'm inclined to believe it, for when women don't like me, they are fiercely against me ! Still, it's my portrait that brings out Clemenceau's characteristics."

"Perhaps M. Clemenceau will come to recognize the error of his ways."

"Never ! That would lower him in his own opinion. I am not angry with him, but I have lost a lot of money over it. For a caprice, and perhaps to prove to myself that I was capable of doing a likeness in a portrait, I began it again ten times over—in sandstone, in wax, in clay. I thought of trying it in marble or granite. Still, I never said Clemenceau was an imbecile, though he was a bad sitter ! I did say that of Victor Hugo ; but I was young then ! "

Most people know the story of Rodin and Victor Hugo. It was Madame Drouet who promised Rodin that he should do Victor Hugo's portrait, and she introduced him to the poet. Hugo had already met Rodin at the house of Léon Cladel, the father of Mademoiselle Judith Cladel. But

when it came to arranging the sittings, Victor Hugo, who in private life was a detestable person, would only allow Rodin to prepare his clay in the verandah of the dining-room and work at his portrait during meal times ; he refused to put himself at Rodin's disposal.

" My best busts are in America—the busts they refused in France ! They called them failures, and they're the best of all ! Clemenceau has only to go to Bouret, who does quite good ' official ' photographs. The likeness will be better in a way, but it won't be the real Clemenceau. But of course it was the Institute that set him against me."

When he was only seventeen Rodin had done a portrait of his father, Jean-Baptiste Rodin. He had treated his subject in the antique manner. Auguste and I found the bust one day when we were rummaging in a lumber-room at Meudon. It was so black with dust and covered with spiders' webs that only Auguste could identify it. We brought it in triumph to Rodin, who was near his end and only half-conscious at the time.

"Do you know this man?" I asked him, as Madame Rodin came up.

Rodin started as if he had just awakened, examined it carefully, then tried to push it towards his wife.

"That's my father," he said, and added, smiling, "He was annoyed because I refused to put in his whiskers, mutton-chop ones like a magistrate. He could not see that, treating the bust as an antique, I was bound to leave them out."

He made us leave the bust on the table where he could see it, and examined it minutely several times during the day. It has now been cast in bronze and is in the Hôtel Biron. Rodin's father had exactly the same profile as Rodin's son Auguste. Madame Rodin mentioned the portrait of Marie, Rodin's sister, who died in a convent when she was twenty-three years old; Rodin had painted it about the same time.

"It's not a' very good painting," he admitted. This portrait was sent to the Hôtel Biron. But I never could find it when I went there, nor could I

find the Gauguin and the Rousseau (the “Customs official”) of which Rodin was so fond.

He had done a portrait of himself in his eighteenth year and given it to one of his friends, Abel Poulin, the sculptor. Poulin had heard of Rodin’s illness, and came to Meudon one day, accompanied by another artist, M. Bois, from Enghien.¹ He had brought the portrait with him and wanted to get Rodin’s permission to present it to the Museum at Blois. It was arranged that I should send him a letter signed by Rodin, who was too tired to sign anything that day.

“But why,” I said to Madame Rodin when they had gone, “why should that portrait go to the Blois Museum? Why not to the Rodin Museum, which is the natural place both for his early and his later works?”

So I drafted the letter in such terms that the Rodin Museum got the portrait; I myself carried the precious canvas to the Hôtel Biron.

To return a moment to the Muse. She was sitting for her portrait. The sittings were by no

means regular—distinctly irregular in fact ! Some days Rodin said she looked tired ; other days, he said she had done her hair badly. When the clay study was well advanced, he suddenly noticed that she wore false hair. From that day onward, he modelled only her face. Madame X. lay down on the floor on her back, her head turned towards the light, her neck held firmly between his knees, while he modelled with his thumb, first touching her flesh and then the clay, his thumb still warm, so to speak, from her skin.

The masterly study of M. Clémentel was interrupted by Rodin's illness and was never completed. One corner of the mouth is unfinished and the top of the head has not been filled. Rodin worked at it now and again when his brain was clear. But his wife, rightly enough, would not let him touch the clay : he would certainly have spoilt the whole study. In that clay he had carved a heavy signature ; it was nothing less than his name in sculpture. The ruggedness and the depth of the lines suggested the influence of some

terrible thought, the thought, so it occurred to me when I saw that kind of signature for the first time, that he was placing his name on his last work. Alas ! it was indeed his last. When the first proof in bronze came back from Rudier's, the signature had disappeared. M. and Madame Clémentel had come to Meudon to visit the sculptor and see the proof. They noticed its disappearance, and M. Clémentel sent for me and asked if I could explain it. It happened to be one of Rodin's fairly good days, and he was amazed that anyone should have dared to efface his signature and substitute that of the foundry.

“ But, M. Clémentel, we have something here that cannot lie—the first mould.”

The moulder brought it and opened it ; there was the signature in relief.

“ They've always tried to trick me,” Rodin lamented.

I have a strong impression that M. Clémentel and Rudier arranged matters, for I saw in the “ Petit Palais,” in an exhibition, a bronze proof

bearing the signature restored, whereas the cast in the Rodin Museum has only the little mark put on by the foundry.

M. Clémentel asked Desbois to finish the modelling of the mouth and the top of the head ; in a moment of impulse Desbois said he would consider the matter. But coming into the studio where I happened to be, he said : “On second thoughts, I shall refuse. If I succeed, people will say it was Rodin. If I fail, they will say I’ve spoilt the bust.”

Rodin had said to me some time earlier, “When I am dead, Desbois will be the greatest sculptor.” I suggested Bartholomé.

“He’s a good artist, but he has prostituted himself to the Institute. He must break away from them.”

I told this to Desbois.

“What Rodin ought to have done,” he remarked, “was to shut himself up in a convent without any nuns. Then we should really have had a great Rodin !”

Rodin had just finished the bust of the Comtesse de Noailles, the poetess. She was far from pleased with it, and told him so. He was extremely angry. I advised him to write to her himself. He did so. He began by expressing his regret at not having satisfied her, then he added, naïvely, that her bust was among the works chosen by the Metropolitan Museum of New York. He asked the illustrious lady for permission to enter it in the catalogue as a Minerva or an archaic Venus.

The next day in came the lady and expressed her disappointment to Rodin himself—not in poetry, but hard emphatic prose.

"I've no luck with women," Rodin said to me, "even when they are poetesses."

But Madame de Noailles thought it over, and some time afterwards she asked Rodin to let her have the bust. I do not know if he gave it to her.

I will finish my recollections of models with one or two little sayings of Rodin. The first was *d propos* his bust of Mr. Harriman, of which an American

friend of the sitter had said that it would be quite like him when the eyeballs were put in.

"A portrait should never be seen before it is quite finished. In front of the first rough outline, people who know nothing about sculpture say that it is not a likeness. But what they don't know is that all that will be transformed when it is completed."

"It makes me happy," he said to me one day, "to see that you, who know nothing about sculpture, always seem moved by mine. I should like people to look at it with tears of emotion in their eyes."

On another occasion he said : "I, who have so greatly loved women, find it soothing to note that nowadays I see them only as subjects for sculpture."

CHAPTER VIII

RODIN'S VISITORS

ONE Sunday I brought two very pretty young girls to Meudon. They had never seen Rodin ; they thought him very handsome and said so.

" My dear young ladies," said Rodin laughing, " if I had known you were coming, I would have had my hair done ! When my hair is curled, I am far handsomer."

" Only to see you, *Maitre*," said one of them, " I should have known you for a great artist."

" The inner beauty shines through, then ? " asked Rodin gravely. The young lady could find no answer.

" With you," I said, " it does shine through when you are your own simple self as you are just now."

" Then I am not often myself," he remarked.

He then took the girls to see his garden, but would not show them his work.

Princess Murat came one day to look at his work. Rodin, skull cap in hand, showed her round and explained everything ; but he was always timid and embarrassed before people of rank. The Princess stopped before two "Bathers" of incomparable grace, passed her gloved hand over their bodies, and exclaimed : "My dear Rodin, what exquisite limbs ! "

That seemed to relieve his shyness.

Mademoiselle Dussane, of the Théâtre Français, came to see Rodin once. When she had admired his work, she recited a piece of poetry. Rodin, who adored the art of declamation, paid her a number of compliments on her beauty, her voice, her talent, and told her she was a great artist. But the moment she had gone out, the Muse exclaimed, "That's all play-acting ! . . . It's not the same thing as a coat-of-arms ! If she had to be natural, she would be like a *bourgeoise*." Rodin made no reply.

Madame Segond-Weber was another visitor. She begged Rodin to do some work in her presence.

He had on his skull cap and his white overall. He obediently took up his mallet and a chisel and set to work. If she had not interrupted him, he would have gone on for a long time, for when Rodin was once at work, he forgot everything else. Madame Segond-Weber had put her gold jewelled bag down on the table, so that she might come closer to Rodin. The Muse was also seated at the same table : she looked at the precious bag with covetous eyes but said nothing. When the great actress had taken her leave, the Muse said to Rodin : "She's ill-bred : one can see she comes from quite common people."

Rodin was indignant, and replied that Madame Segond-Weber was an artist of genius, greater in her art than he was in his ; moreover, he added, she was a friend of his. However, a quarter of an hour afterwards he was brought to the concession that Madame X. was the most perfect of women, and that no other could equal her ! Such scenes were only too frequent—ridiculous but pathetic.

M. Paul Gsell called one day with some drawings he had brought back with him ; they had been used to illustrate conversations with Rodin, a chapter in a book entitled "L'Art." Rodin would not let him in, but he came out in person to make his excuses : "My dear friend, Madame is in with me—she's not at all well—so, you understand."

Gsell did not insist, and Rodin left him, full of regrets. I told Gsell that the illness that was causing the great sculptor such sympathetic pain was due to an overdose of whiskey.

Rodin was very fond of the sculptor Despiau ; but the Muse was not. Despiau often came to the Rue de Varenne to study the work of the master, for whom he himself was working. But unless I could get to the door first and bring him in to Rodin, the Muse always said, "No, dearest, you're not at home to that bore!"—and Despiau had to go away. Rodin was sorry, but did not dare say anything.

One morning Rodin came in early from Meudon

to meet the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, with whom he was going on a journey. The illustrious Italian arrived at the Hôtel Biron in company with a very beautiful lady, who was leading a white greyhound, quite as aristocratic as the pretty lady, on a leash. Between the lady and Rodin, d'Annunzio looked like a little country attorney. They all three said goodbye to me when they went away, but they took no notice of the Muse ; Rodin had not introduced her. When they had gone, she burst out in fury.

" It's all my fault ! " she shrieked, " I who could have had kings for my lovers ! I'm paying dearly in my circle for having given myself to that lout, that clown, that ill-mannered, ignorant old fool of a Rodin ! "

She was beside herself with rage.

" Don't talk like that of him," I begged her. " He's simply an old child. If he had all his senses, you wouldn't be here ! "

When she saw that I took Rodin's side, she shrieked all the louder, " He's a fool ! "

" Possibly," I answered—I was getting angry—"but he has the money bags."

She calmed down, and we went off to lunch together.

Rodin's friendship with Mademoiselle Cladel was often attacked hotly, especially by the Muse. One afternoon, when I was out, Mademoiselle Cladel came to the Hôtel Biron to see Rodin. I do not know what passed between them, but when I came back Rodin said to me, very downcast : "I've just quarrelled with Mademoiselle Cladel."

" Why ? "

" She won't obey me as she used to."

" That's not a very serious reason. You have a mania for quarrelling with your real friends. Mademoiselle Cladel loves you, and she won't bear you ill will."

" Run and tell her to come and see me, quick ! "

" I will, *Maitre*, but give me a letter to take to her from you."

He wrote a most charming letter there and then, and when Mademoiselle Cladel arrived, he was as

nice as possible and quite forgot that he had been disagreeable.

But other Muses came upon the scene, and sorely tried the very sincere affection Mademoiselle Cladel had for the artist.

One New Year's Day, Rodin had to go to a reception at the Elysée, and he asked me to come and meet him after the ceremony at the Hôtel Biron. As we should be alone, he wanted to profit by it to do some work on the "Ariadne," a large funerary figure that belonged to M. Grunbaum. Many other people had been working at it, and had taken so much off it that it could not possibly ever be completed. Rodin had received part of the agreed price—ten thousand francs out of forty thousand.

That morning I had gone to Meudon to take some flowers to Madame Rodin, and she had talked to me about the many New Year's Days she had spent all alone, while Rodin was squandering money and flowers on that "odious C." Rose was in tears, waiting for the New Year's greetings and

wishes her faithless old husband should have brought her. She cried so bitterly that to calm her I told her quite coolly that Mademoiselle C. was dead. Heaven pardon me the lie.

At two o'clock Rodin reached the Hôtel Biron with a big bag of sweets, which he presented to me. "I wish," said he, in answer to my good wishes, "to live a long time, so that you may stay by my side for many, many years."

He set to work at once, in his frock-coat and all, like a man who is in a great hurry. While I sharpened his tools, he recalled memories of former New Year's Days passed in wild frolics. I noted that if he were to be believed, he had always been the victim ! He also spoke of Mademoiselle Camille C., whom he had loved madly ; and his mind was filled with the past, good and bad alike. Then all at once he lapsed into silence, and I did not disturb him or break in upon his reverie. But a few moments later, answering his own thoughts, no doubt, he murmured: "When women have bronze and marble and clay, the stuff

of which creation is made, for rivals, they find a sculptor a mighty poor lover ! ”

The bell rang and I opened the door. It was the Duchesse de Rohan ; she could not have come upon Rodin at a better moment. That great lady, so simple despite her title, with her kindly face under the white hair, had come on this first day of the year, on the chance, to greet the artist, as good comrades do. She was indeed a welcome visitor, a friend. She kissed Rodin like a brother and wished him a thousand good wishes for happiness : he was evidently touched, for when she had left, he came up to me, his fine old face radiant with pleasure.

“ The Duchesse de Rohan has kissed me,” he said. “ I will pass on her kiss to you : it will bring me good fortune. The Duchesse de Rohan is a woman, as simple and womanly as you are. Simplicity in clever women is always a sign of goodness.”

Wishing to keep to that good impression, he sent me to tell the porter he was at home to nobody ;

and he set to work with a fervour and calm that were, alas, only too rare with him.

"New Year's Day," I said, "is a day to be passed at home with the family. Your family does not often come to see you."

"My family is very small," said he. "I never see them. Sometimes they write to me, but it's always to ask me for something."

That evening I accompanied him to the Invalides station. "I have had a very good day," he said : "I'm happy."

CHAPTER IX

RODIN AND LITERATURE

RODIN discovered that I possessed a typewriter, and asked me to bring it to Meudon so that I might use it for letters and for copying his notes. The first time he saw my fingers running over the keyboard, he sat down beside me, a piece of clay in his hand. He went into raptures over the machine. It interested him so much that he began to think of modelling some studies of hands.

I recopied fragmentary phrases of his ideas on sculpture, on the sky, the earth, trees ; on anything and everything that passed through his mind. I also typed out—many, many times over, for he was never satisfied with what he had done—the notes Charles Morice, the poet, was putting into shape. The tedious and eternal revision went on for months and months. I reproduced his notes on architecture, word for word. But he insisted on supervising them. Often when I read a passage

over to him which was more or less in shape, he would exclaim : " Beautiful ! beautiful ! "

All the same, he had doubts as to his literary ability, and many a time he said : " I shall never be able to write well." But writing was more than an amusement ; it was almost an obsession with him.

" It is very difficult to write a book," he said one day. " It is like sculpture. They don't understand me when I explain things. Charles Morice read me a chapter of my *Cathédrales*, and I couldn't understand a word of it. He makes me tell lies every minute ! But then he's a critic, and critics understand nothing about art, whether it's painting or sculpture. They don't need to. It's the verdict of the public that prevails."

I never interrupted when I saw him disposed to hold forth, for he seldom talked, and then only in brief phrases.

" There are no more sculptors," he continued ; " no more painters since they took to giving them prizes. That's what kills art and artists. To gain

those prizes, they try to do something new, something original, and they turn out that Cubist stuff, that filth that sickens me. The whole of art lies in the human body. Bernini took a man's body for the door of a palace ; he took flowers for the ornamentation ; and the trees gave him the pillars. The whole of architecture comes from the earth, from man. And to-day they are Cubists ! ”

He laughed, a little sadly, and then, as if afraid of losing the thread, went on.

“ Write this quickly, before I forget it. Landscape is the avenue of architecture . . . the highway of architecture. I will think out the exact expression. To-day everyone uses dictionaries. They change the words and the true meaning is lost. I never look at a dictionary.”

“ Then why did you buy the big Larousse ? ”

“ To please the Academicians. Octave Mirbeau, Loti, Bourget, they're true writers ! None of the rest count. My book will be a book of instruction for artists who don't want to work. I want to do it all myself. Afterwards I shall show it to

Academicians and friends, and I shall publish it if the Institute will leave me in peace."

M. Hanotaux and M. L. Gillet did the book. Rodin was merely the signatory. But that did not prevent his sending me to see Colin, the publisher, to ask if he would publish a volume of "Thoughts" and on what terms. He was very dissatisfied when he returned from Ermenonville, where he had gone to see Gillet and Hanotaux and correct the notes in the book.

"They have gone all over it and have left very little of me in it. It's just what happened with Charles Morice. They change every word I write. I wanted them simply to correct my mistakes in spelling and punctuation, and they transform my ideas! They haven't even been able to find a title that pleases me!"

A few days afterwards, however, M. Hanotaux found a title which was lucky enough to please Rodin; he was delighted.

"Hanotaux understands me very well," he said. "He's quite the opposite of those literary men who

know nothing about sculpture ; he grasps my thought at once and changes it so little that it proves he understands it."

He thereupon decided to go to Nice to see M. Hanotaux, and finish the book alone with him.

The *Gil Blas* was arranging an exhibition of his drawings, and Rodin busied himself over this for several days. He had a bundle of drawings on the floor before him, while I, on my knees between his feet with my back to him, held up each drawing at arm's length above my head, in the full light. He stopped me again and again to admire his own work.

"Put down 'very fine' . . . 'fine.' "

The Muse stood by, approving.

He was looking at one drawing of a figure in flight, apparently a study for a ceiling, and the Muse remarked : "One would almost say it was an aeroplane !" Rodin, delighted with the idea, exclaimed : "Quick, quick ! Write '*Aréoplane*' on the back."

In the same way he would write *phantôme* . . .

orgeuil . . . cariatide . . . and was most astonished when I told him *cariatide* had no *h*. "Those are trifles for a man like myself," he replied, and he told me to write *cariatide* as he wrote it, with an *h*. He also had curious ideas on punctuation. "Punctuation," he used to say to me, "is the whole of literature. It's punctuation that makes literature comprehensible. Don't put any stops. I will do it myself. M. Hanotaux is an intelligent man, but he would be far more so if he knew how to punctuate."

One morning on his return from a journey, he handed me a bundle of "Thoughts," warning me that they were very fine and very precious. I didn't dare to put them into shape, but showed him a serious mistake in his French. "My French? that means nothing. It's the commas that mean everything in what I do. And it's your not putting them in the right places that makes it difficult to understand. Besides, didn't I tell you not to put any?"

I could not follow his thought, and I told him so.

"I want obedience, before everything else," he shouted. "Do what I tell you without answering back. I'm the only one who understands, the only one who knows what I want to say in my book."

"Still," I ventured, "you can't be the one and only reader of your books!"

He shrugged his shoulders, said I was too argumentative, and walked off.

One morning when I was reading letters he was designing a bas-relief. He broke off his work, and murmured : "My poor cathedrals! they feel they are dying, and they smirk at me."

I did not disturb this lyric soliloquy. He went on drawing, and began talking to himself as he often used to. I would catch the sound of conversation inside the room, and on opening the door, would find him alone talking in front of his clay and marbles. That morning he discoursed on Gothic architecture, on archaic art, on trees and flowers and on Nature, his favourite theme. Then he took me into the garden and went on talking, while I listened in silence. All at once he noticed that I

had forgotten to bring a notebook to take down what he said.

“Idiot! do you understand what I’ve been saying?”

“I don’t know why,” I answered; “I’m surprised to see we’re not both walking about clothed in animal’s skins!”

“No one understands,” he muttered.

He wouldn’t allow shorthand. He used to bend over the signs peering at them with curiosity and suspicion. He was amazed that anyone should be able to make words with signs.

“I prefer ordinary writing,” he would say, “for I can check it myself: but with that stuff you could deceive me and make me say things I never said.”

He would dictate the same letter a dozen times over, but no variety of version could express or keep pace with his ever-changing ideas, and as often as not they were never sent.

The Muse did not like Charles Morice, for he had not bowed his head before the august lady, whom he called “Influenza.” Rodin, on the

other hand, was fond of the poet ; we often used to talk of him.

When he brought back the manuscript of *Les Cathédrales*, Rodin wrote, of his own accord : "Charles Morice has illumined the cathedral that *is* Rodin ! He has given to it the clear light that it lacked."

"He is sincere," Rodin told me. "He gives himself, without calculation, for others and for art. He is not rich and he never will be ; he lives in a dream, but he has a great heart."

And yet they quarrelled ! It was over an article that did not please the Muse but which Rodin liked.

Morice wrote to me : "Rodin has made me write a letter, signed by him, to say he is far from pleased with the article in the *Paris-Journal*. Give me your version of what took place between him and 'Influenza.' Not that I care, except that I note once more with pain the unbridgeable gulf between mind and character in this artist, whom I admire so greatly in spite of everything."

And then, suddenly, Rodin refused to let the *Cathédrales* be published, and gave the manuscript

to Madame V. de Saint P. to correct. I warned Charles Morice.

"It's a catastrophe," he said. "They will be destroyed."

He went to see Rodin. They could not agree. Rodin wrote fresh notes, and Mario Meunier arranged them under his direction. Charles Morice was heart-broken.

"I can't prevent the destruction of the *Cathédrales*," he said. "The unfrocked priest is acting as you might expect in collaborating in the work, and Rodin, who has no longer any affection for me, won't listen to what I say."

A little later he wrote : "From Rodin we have always complications to fear, less from him than from 'Influenza.' It is evident they've made him pride himself on his literary talent ; it has its funny side, but it is not without danger."

He dropped Rodin ; but in that he was wrong. Rodin still preserved all his esteem for him. One day, for example, an art critic was talking about Morice, and said :

"Charles Morice is a fool."

Rodin made no answer. But when the critic had gone, he said to me, "Charles Morice a fool? Like me? Sincerity is a fault—but it's better to be faulty than vile." And when the same critic came a few days later, he would not receive him.

M. Gustave Coquiot had come to live at the Hôtel Biron as Rodin's secretary. He was writing a book called, I think, *Rodin Intime*, or *Le vrai Rodin*.

"I dare not give him orders," Rodin said to me one day at Meudon, whither I had been relegated. "It seems he is a distinguished writer."

I didn't know M. Coquiot. But Rodin made me rewrite at Meudon all that M. Coquiot had written in the Rue de Varenne. The result was a confusion that gave us much trouble. I asked M. Coquiot for an interview to see how he could best serve our beloved master. Before we could meet, someone had told Rodin a story about Coquiot and a Paris publisher: Rodin broke with Coquiot, but gave him a plaster cast of the "Man with the broken nose."

M. Coquiot did not appear again at the Hôtel

Biron, but a friend told Rodin that his book *Le vrai Rodin* was nothing but a tissue of lies.

"If it's all lies, it isn't worth my while to read it," the sculptor replied. And as the author had not sent him a copy, he refused to buy one.

Rodin was very fond of M. Gustave Geffroy. If the appointment of curator for the Rodin Museum, on which the Government were not yet agreed, had lain with him, he would certainly have chosen Geffroy. M. Geffroy had sent him a book of photographs from the Italian museums for which he had written the text ; Rodin showed me the book and tried to make me understand the relationship of his own art with that of Michael Angelo.

"Can't you see it ?" he asked.

"Looking at those reproductions without their signature, I should have said they were your work," I said as we looked at the "Martyrs."

"Then I am only an imitator. I've created nothing personal ?"

"I don't mean that, *Maitre*. But you yourself have told me many times that nothing was new,

that all actions and gestures were enchain'd within humanity, which was itself no more than a sequence of connected links. From this I inferred, wrongly perhaps, that between Michael Angelo and Rodin the chain was broken and you had joined it together again."

He listened, knitting his brows.

" If anyone else said that to me, I should not feel flattered. Then you consider that if Michael Angelo had never lived, there would have been no Rodin ? "

" I don't know what to say."

" Well, I say you are stupid."

Mademoiselle Judith Cladel wrote an article on Rodin, which he helped her to plan out in several long conversations. She was a most conscientious worker, and undoubtedly the only person who could exactly transcribe Rodin's thoughts on art. Moreover, she wrote her articles in his presence, almost sentence by sentence.

I gave this opinion to M. Clémentel and M. Bénédite in Rodin's presence, and he agreed with me ; they were discussing the question of entrust-

ing the artist's writings to a man of letters. Nothing ever came of it, for it is stated in the codicil in M. Bénédite's possession : "I charge my friend, Léonce Bénédite, solely and exclusively, with the selection and publication of all my writings and letters." And yet how often Rodin had said to me : "Judith Cladel exactly understands my thought and my soul ! "

But Mademoiselle Judith Cladel had need of all her courage to put up with Rodin's changing humours. She found that courage in her deep and sincere affection for him. One day she came to read an article she had written practically at his dictation. He thought it very good, but the next morning changed his mind and sent one of his moulders to the Préfecture de Police to ask the procedure necessary for suppressing the issue of the paper which published it. He was prepared to pay all the costs himself. He then sent a polisher to the office of one of the sheriffs. Then he sent me to the Police Commissioner with somewhat vague instructions, my objections having muddled

his ideas. Naturally, I did not go there, but to the offices of the paper. The article was in print and I brought back a copy to Rodin ; the managing editor came too, with Mademoiselle Cladel. But Rodin would not give way.

The next day, however, I read the article over again to him, without any mention of what had happened the day before, and he thought it very good. The article in question was entitled *Rodin et la Statuaire moderne*, and it appeared in *La Vie* for September, 1910.

I cannot help execrating those who gave Rodin the idea of trying his hand at literature. It is due to them that so many superb works, put aside in favour of his literary attempts, are lost to art and to his country. He wrote and wrote, scribbled, rather, and for the most part what he produced was valueless. But the snobs applauded, saying it was wonderful. He accepted their praise, but was not at all convinced that he had such gifts. He used to say : "I'm not a literary man ; I write what I see, and I express it as best I can." Alas,

his "admirers" were besieging him to write his thoughts at the very time when he had in mind the intention of building his Tower of Labour. It was a noble project, worthy of Rodin ; and Paris would have been proud of it to-day !

"They'll never give me time for it," he would say, as though his time were subordinate to the wishes of these futile flatterers !

He explained the symbolism of his Tower as he visualized it.

"The Tower of Labour," he said, "will be a column, like the July column, covered with bas-reliefs ; but these, instead of recording historical events, will take us simply through the stages of the work of the human race. On the coping will be my Blessings, the reward merited by a life of labour accomplished. The worker will climb one by one the steps of the great stairway, pausing, thinking, before each bas-relief ; and when he is at the summit, on the platform, the wings of angels in blessing will cast a restful shade on his weary head. In the crypt below the ground will repose my

remains when I am no more—the remains of one who was a great worker.”

I said nothing, knowing his intense terror of death.

Often I had said to him : “A man like you can never die. The outer form may depart, but the rest remains. Dead, you will be even greater, maybe.”

“ Maybe yes, maybe no,” he replied. But my thought pleased him.

“ They will climb my Tower as they climb the Bastille Column. What was to be no more than a pastime for the worker may perhaps become a subject for study.”

I rejoiced in this diversion from “literature,” but suddenly he broke off. “Quick, my notebook of ‘Thoughts !’ I want to write, to make a note of what I’ve just said ! It is beautiful.”

The project on a reduced scale—it was only a project and Rodin had barely outlined it—has now been taken up by another ; but without Rodin’s counsels and Rodin’s hand it can never be more than a soulless imitation.

Why should people want to make of a sculptor of genius what he could never be, a man of letters ? Many serious thinkers have read his "Thoughts"—his admirable "Thoughts" on art, on flowers, on the sky and the atmosphere. The version the public knows, which has passed through many revisers' hands, may seem to possess some worth ; indeed, it has the smoothness of something far away, softened by the centuries. But it is no more than a piece of cunning stage scenery, retouched and propped up. I have before me an unpublished fragment of those "Thoughts," scrawled in pencil on the back of a letter from a model asking for employment ; the letters are badly formed, the words stumble and trip, the sentences are incomplete. I give a specimen here : I leave the spelling as he wrote it :

*Ces nuages frisés blancs, cette crème fouettée.
Ils sont dans le perspective anonyme quand ils
passent au-dessus de vastes arbres . . . entre les
arbres on voit comme des terres de géographies
immenses sur les cieux découpé. La majesté des*

*arbres réunis en bouquet ose se composer au ciel.
Il y a pour les bêtes la joie d'aimer la beauté.
Nous, on nous forme au malheur . . . les gens
intelligents ne savent plus ce que les bêtes savent
. . . nos mauvaises éducations entretenues avec
soin nous cachent la lumière. Toute une vie de
suicides, dont on sourira . . . les nations neurasthéniques. . . . Bourrée—Pendant qu'elle danse
elle est inondé de lumière . . . ma lumière ;
les pulsations de mon cœur qui bat aussi la mesure . . .*

I never saw Rodin open any books other than those he bought for their binding from the antique dealers at Versailles. The great library at the Hôtel Biron was full of them. Now and again he would take one from its shelf, open it, and chant, deciphering the text : "Louis XIV . . . Louis XV . . ." Then he would replace the volume on its shelf. Only for one book did he ever show any enthusiasm in my presence ; it was a study on Bernin, by a young author from Grenoble, M. Reymond.

He used to go through the cuttings from the



Photo by

[*Manuel*]

RODIN IN HIS GARDEN AT MEUDON

Argus, but he never read very long letters through to the end. One morning one of these *Argus* cuttings threw him into a great rage.

"Here is a pack of fools," he cried, "who blame me for not completing my statues ! Does Nature complete her work ? Can you stipple a tree ? Shades of Phidias ! What ignorant asses we have for our judges ! Just to annoy those fools, I'll never do another complete figure. I will do antiques ! "

"Leave me in peace," he exclaimed when I put a question to him. "I'm tired. I've got to think—I want to think."

And away he walked into the garden in his studio gown, holding his beard, his head a little on one side, his brow wrinkled. He walked, stopped, talked to himself, gesticulated. Suddenly he came running back and called out to me abruptly:

"Did you take the dog out this morning, *mon chat* ? "

CHAPTER X

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

THE rumours that war was going to be declared left Rodin sceptical right up to the day when he had difficulty in getting money. A lover of money, but at the same time improvident, he found himself, on August 3rd, 1914, absolutely without money. So he sent me to see his great friend M. Peytel, the Manager of the Crédit Algérien, also to M. Dorizon, who was still manager of the Société Générale, to draw a thousand francs from each of them.

When he had given me one of the two receipts and was making out the other, he said :

“Without those two men, those two great friends of art, men of real intelligence and understanding although they are bankers, I should never have been what I am.”

“Why?” I asked, hoping for an anecdote.

“They were the men who gave me the first real money I had,” he replied, radiant at the recollection.

And he told me the story.

"I was sixty. I hadn't a penny to spare. My forty years' work was scattered about in all kinds of odd corners—I saw no chance of fame. They came and offered me forty thousand francs to enable me to show my works at the 1900 Exhibition in a section bearing my name."

"That was no more than your due."

"Quite so ; but all the same I was so touched that I could not bring myself to accept. But they were generous. They understood my embarrassment, and said : 'Don't think about any payment. If you don't have success—and that's unthinkable—you won't owe us anything.' "

Greatly moved at the recollection, he added : "Don't forget those two true friends."

I went to them. M. Peytel, always very busy, very active, said : "Well, well, what does Rodin want now ? "

"He has no money at Meudon, and he wishes to draw a thousand francs."

I handed him the receipt. He laughed and

went with me to the cashier's office. He is a charming man. I have had scores of opportunities of appreciating the sincere affection that existed between him and Rodin, whose interests he defended with such hearty goodwill. After the master's death it was Peytel who took up the cause of his son Auguste against the machinations of some of those last-minute friends who called him "Father Terror."

M. Dorizon was very cordial and also gave me a thousand-francs note, which, to save me a long wait at the cashier's office, he took out of his own pocket-book. He spoke of Rodin in most affectionate terms, and I repeated the story the latter had just told me. He appeared touched, and made me promise to give him news of Rodin if the latter did not write.

When I got back to Meudon I found Rodin much disturbed, glancing rapidly through a number of newspapers ; he was in a very bad temper, and was only quieted by hearing how kindly his friends had received me.

The next day, to the great grief of the household, the military authorities came and requisitioned Rataplan. Rataplan was an old horse, crippled with rheumatism ; we used him for Rodin's daily drive round Meudon and the neighbourhood.

"To think that I'm going to see another war," cried Madame Rodin. "My poor Rataplan ! Our poor old Rataplan !" And she wept bitterly.

How often had I accompanied them on those drives ! She was always silent, watching for Rodin's least movement as he sat absorbed in contemplation of the sky or in noting vague impressions in a notebook, the pages of which he tore out one by one.

Madame Hanako, a tiny charming Japanese, and a most talented artist, had just arrived from Germany, driven out by the mobilization. As everyone knows, Rodin had modelled some superb masks from her. On her arrival she wrote to him and told him she had nothing but German money.

"To-morrow you shall go and meet Madame Hanako," Rodin said to me. "I shall keep her

here at Meudon while she is arranging her affairs. You must bring her back with you. She needn't bring anything with her. We've got everything that she can want."

He was in raptures at the idea of having this wonderful model, and added :

" I shall work at a new mask of her, a mask which shall immortalize her."

Rodin explained the case to his wife, and she said she would let Madame Hanako live in her cottage. While Madame Hanako was unpacking her things, Rodin called me.

" Are there many letters ? "

" Yes, *Maitre*."

He sat in silence, holding his beard, while I read them.

" No one seems to trouble about my health," he said. " They all write to ask me for money. I haven't any money. I'm not rich ! Throw them all into the waste-paper basket. I shan't answer any of them. Come and take a turn in the garden."

We went out. He was absorbed in his thoughts, and when we got to the court-yard, he stood still looking embarrassed. Then all at once he spoke abruptly, as a man does when he has to say something difficult.

"I'm going to entrust you with a mission ; something I can only entrust to a friend."

"I am at your orders, *mon cher Maître*."

"I want you to go to the Rue Latérale, St. Ouen, and find Auguste—Auguste, you know."

"Your son ?"

"Yes. You will tell him that in view of all that seems likely to happen, he must come here to us. Perhaps he won't want to. He is living with someone, I believe. You will tell him to bring her with him. I don't know how it will answer ; he never could get on with me. He's a proud, blundering fellow, an artist, very touchy. And to think that he has talent, the fool, and that he has never done anything ! He's a lazy fellow."

"Have you helped him at all ?" I asked.

He seemed very surprised at the question,

looked at me, and went on without giving me an answer.

"Go and find him, tell him to come just as he is ; bring him back with you. He need not bring anything ; he'll find everything he needs here. Tell him—that may persuade him—that I will arrange an exhibition of his work."

"Has he any money ?" I asked.

"I sent him two hundred francs a couple of days ago by his cousin."

I was just starting when Rodin stopped me. He scrutinized me with keen attention, as though he saw me for the first time.

"You are free, full of energy," he said. "Why shouldn't you marry Auguste ? He's not a bad fellow, and you would make something of him. I would give you a handsome dowry."

I began laughing, rather loudly, so that Madame Rodin put her head out of the window. Rodin called out to her.

"Rose, *mon chat*, listen ! I've just been telling her she ought to marry Auguste."

Poor Rose reddened and replied in a very low voice :

" You're quite right, Monsieur Rodin. I should be only too glad to see him married to a good woman who wasn't an idler."

Rodin again spoke of giving the dowry, of helping us. I said nothing. I had often heard them speak of Auguste, who had not a particularly good reputation.

" But," I said, " Auguste has a wife. I haven't the courage to break a union, even if it is an unlawful one."

" That's quite right," said Madame Rodin quickly.

Rodin looked at me for some minutes without speaking. I had uttered the words "unlawful union" without thinking, and I was afraid I had annoyed him.

The next day I went to St. Ouen. Auguste was living in a portable house. He had added to his work as an artist-engraver the more lucrative trade of a rag-and-bone dealer. I gave him his

father's message. He said nothing for a few moments, and then : " And what about my wife ? "

" Your father said you were to bring her with you."

While he was talking to her I watched him closely. His resemblance to his mother was very marked. He had Rodin's mouth, however, and Rodin's gestures, and much of his expression. From his early upbringing with Rodin and his mother he had preserved an extreme politeness, affected, and even exaggerated. He seemed to be always dreading something, and this made him awkward and timid. Unhappy in his childhood, unhappy in his regiment, unhappy in his union, very unstable in his ideas, and of very weak character, he was as timorous as a child.

They arrived at Meudon next day, and we all had lunch together in the small dining-room—Rodin, Madame Hanako, Auguste and Auguste's " wife," a crafty little woman from Normandy. Madame Rodin waited on us and kept saying to Auguste :

" Eat, Auguste ; eat, *ma fille*."

"I'm not hungry, *maman*," he replied timidly.

His "wife," to my great surprise, called Rodin *papa*, and Madame Rodin *maman*. The first time she did so, Rodin, who was sitting between Madame Hanako and me, gave a start, reddened, and set his jaw. I took his hand under the table in an instinctive impulse of protection.

This woman whom Auguste had brought with him had a black bandage over her eye ; she told a story, to which nobody listened, about a brawl of some sort at St. Ouen as the cause of it.

A few days later the quarrels began.

"I do not wish you to call me *papa*," Rodin said to Auguste. "You must call me *Maitre* or *Monsieur*, as your mother does."

"Never !" said Auguste, in anger.

"Very well, then you shall go ! "

"I will, at once !" retorted Auguste.

As he started for the cottage to pack up, Rodin called him back.

"Don't lose your temper ; don't be a fool. Come with me ; you shall help me."

And he took him into the big studio, where they moved various plaster studies about. When Auguste came back to his mother, the poor fellow was in tears.

It would take a volume to tell all the quarrels between Auguste and his mother, between his wife and his father. The little woman from St. Ouen was not going to be "put upon," and one day when Rodin told her she was dirty and called her a rag-and-bone dealer, she stiffened up in revolt, put her hands on her hips and gave him a piece of her mind.

"I'm a rag-and-bone dealer, am I? Quite so, Monsieur Rodin, I was a rag-and-bone dealer. Every trade keeps men alive, Monsieur Rodin! And I've had enough of your beastly house! Your son! He's in your way, your son! Well, you should have let us alone and not made us come here!"

I pass over the rest. Rodin went out saying : "Leave us in peace. I won't have scenes."

I behaved as if I had seen nothing. Poor man! A few days afterwards, he said to Nini : "I should like to give you a present, Madame. I'd like to

buy you a costume—a simple one—in two parts.
What do you call that ? ”

“ A tailor-made costume, Monsieur Rodin.”

“ That’s it : a tailor-made costume. A hundred francs, will that be enough ? ”

“ Oh ! thank you, Monsieur Rodin ! You’re really too kind.”

“ Well, keep on with your sweeping, keep everything clean—no papers lying about in the garden.”

Madame Rodin made a scene over the costume ; to revenge herself she wouldn’t give more than eighty francs for it.

Nobody ever came to see Rodin at that time, and we were almost always alone at Meudon. Fearing that he would not have enough to provide for his household, though it was not a large one, Rodin had sent away his moulders and servants. Auguste did the gardener’s work, with much grumbling and ill-temper ; his wife did the house-work. There were endless quarrels.

I took Auguste’s part so far as I could, for I knew that his affection for his parents was really

sincere. I argued with Madame Rodin, sometimes with much warmth. Rodin listened to us, and nodded his head, and invariably my defence of Auguste ended with his approval of what I said.

"Madame Rodin, you don't know your son ! He's better than he's supposed to be. A mother shouldn't speak ill of her child. I assure you Auguste loves you and respects you, and suffers from your temper."

Five minutes afterwards Madame Rodin was talking quite kindly of Auguste. She told me stories of his childhood.

"When he came into the world," Madame Rodin said to me, "he was a beautiful baby, but very naughty. He cried all the time. M. Rodin used to get in a rage !—the crying disturbed him when he was working. We weren't rich then, eh, *ma vieille* ? "

Rodin assented, smiling.

"One day when Auguste had smiled at his father," she went on, "M. Rodin said to me, 'Rose, I'm very glad it's a boy.' 'If only he hasn't your nasty

character !' I answered. ' I don't mind if he has my character' M. Rodin said, 'if only he's an artist, and works like me ! In those days, fifty-one years ago, *ma vieille*, you were always making clay studies of a mother and child. You remember ! You gave me one and I've always kept it.' "

Rodin wanted to see it, and she went to fetch it from the cottage. This charming group, of infinite delicacy of workmanship, was given to me by Auguste after the death of his mother. At M. Bénédite's wish, I sold it to him, together with a painting by Rodin, a landscape he had done in Belgium—"The Banks of the Cambre." M. Bénédite bought these works for his collection. He gave me four hundred francs for them.

"To-morrow," Rodin said to me one day, "come to Meudon first. We will go off early to the Hôtel Biron."

When I got to Meudon, he had already left. I returned to the Hôtel Biron. He was waiting for me there, quite forgetting that he had told me to come and fetch him at Meudon.

"We'll go first to the *Société Générale* and see if I can draw some money."

His account stood at a hundred and ten thousand francs ; he drew eleven thousand. He counted the money over and over again for a good half-hour, most carefully. Then he took up his pocket-book, which he had at hand ready for the money, but put it back, empty, in the inside pocket of his overcoat. He snatched up all the notes in a crumpled mass and pushed them into the outside pocket of the overcoat.

"Really, *cher Maître*," I said when we were back in the carriage, "it is hardly prudent to leave all that money loose like that in your pocket ; you might lose some of it when you pull out your handkerchief."

He took out the bundle of notes, put them on my lap, handed me the empty pocket-book and asked me to count it all over again. I did so, with the utmost care, but when I found it a thousand francs short, he absolutely refused to search in his pocket. I was so vexed that I began to cry.

Then at last he consented to search, but only after calling me an idiot, and telling me I had no sense of order and didn't know what I was about, with other compliments of the same kind. Before we reached the Hôtel Biron, he said suddenly : "Why haven't you reminded me that I've got to go to the Beaux-Arts ! "

"I didn't know you had to go there, *Maitre*."

"You're always arguing. How do you expect me to know what I've got to do ? Whether I'm to stay here or to go away ? If I'm in any danger, the Minister will tell me. I don't belong to myself ; I belong to the State, and it's their business to protect me. I'm their only great artist, and I've given them all my works of art."

He grumbled on into his beard. He had often said to me : "If I had lived in the days of Francis I, I should have had a pension from the king and eaten at his table."

He got down at the Rue de Valois, leaving me in the carriage. Happily my old friend Jehan Rictus was coming out of the Ministry. He

caught sight of me and came up to keep me company.

"I've met Rodin," he said. "Is he going in to ask the Minister for money?"

"No, he's got into a panic, and is going to ask if he ought to leave Paris, also probably for protection for his works—for their works, I should say."

A good half-hour later Rodin came back. I accompanied him to the Invalides station. There he left me, telling me to meet him in the afternoon at the Hôtel Biron. He didn't appear. The next day I went back to Meudon. In the train which passed mine a little before the station of Pont Mirabeau, I caught sight of Rodin and his wife on their way to Paris. I got out and took the Métro, and reached the Invalides station at the same time as they did. They looked like a pair of emigrants. Madame Rodin, dressed anyhow, in haste, had a small travelling bag in her hand ; Rodin had his pale yellow money wallet slung round his neck, bandolier fashion. They were waiting

for a carriage. As I have already said, nothing Rodin did ever surprised me.

"And where are you off to now?" I asked Madame Rodin.

"I haven't an idea. M. Rodin said to me an hour ago : 'Rose, *mon chat*, dress yourself, we're going away!' I didn't ask him any questions ; you know how it is, don't you? One can't say anything to him ; he'd fly into a rage."

I tackled Rodin.

"Where are you going, *cher Maître*?"

"I'm taking my wife to the Hôtel Biron," he answered with a smile. "We're both going to stop there. Come along at three o'clock and help her put things straight."

CHAPTER XI

JOURNEYS AND INTRIGUES

WHEN I reached the Rue de Varenne at three o'clock the servant told me that Rodin and his wife had started for England with Mademoiselle Judith Cladel and her mother, leaving neither address nor instructions ! I was used to these unexpected departures. Often Rodin would say in the evening: "I'm going away for two or three days." Weeks afterwards he would still be travelling, without giving us news or telling where he was.

This time they had gone without even a night-dress or food to eat on the journey. Rose was just as casual as her husband, and the two would have gone perfectly happily to the other end of the world if, instead of finding Mademoiselle Cladel on her way to England, they had come across anyone who offered to take them to the Cannibal Islands ! They left me without a penny. They were gone and there was no more to be said. They forgot

Auguste too ; he applied to me, but I knew no more than he.

I wrote to Mademoiselle Cladel, and she read my letter to Rodin, but he didn't answer at once. When at last a letter came, on October 3rd, I was able to set about putting things straight at Meudon and the Hôtel Biron. It was no small task ! The old proverb, "When the cat's away, the mice will play," was fulfilled. At Meudon especially the moulders and the servants were at loggerheads. And at the Hôtel Biron a relative of Madame Rodin had installed herself and was taking in soldiers as lodgers ; her husband was with the colours, and she would not leave.

Auguste, having no news of his father and being without a penny, took work in a factory, but on my persuasion went back to his engraving.

On November 30th Rodin came back. He had left London as he had left Paris, without a word to anyone. On receiving a telegram from him I went to the Hôtel Terminus and found him sitting in his underclothes. He was alone, and looked as if he

were lost. He was drinking chocolate and studying English. In front of him on the table lay a vocabulary of words and phrases in common use, which he was reading with the utmost care and attention. I made him repeat some. This amused him greatly. "Please, Misteur, love you," he read. He announced that he was going to Italy to do a bust of the Pope.

"Did he ask for you?"

"No. It was through Jean de Bonnefon and Cardinal Vanutelli's sister that I was able to have sittings arranged. And you, what are your plans?"

"I have none, or practically none. If you were going to stay away a long time, I should try to join a nurses' ambulance corps. But you would have to help me."

"And what about me?" he exclaimed.

He wanted to know how one became a nurse. When I told him one had to pay a certain sum of money, he replied :

"Leave that for richer people. I shall come back soon, and we'll work together again."

I helped him to dress and put on his boots, wrote some letters and then accompanied him to the hairdresser in the St. Lazare station, where he kept me waiting for two hours.

"Come back to-night at about six o'clock," he said, "and we'll have a talk."

I did not see him at six o'clock. He had gone off to Italy. On February 3rd, 1915, I received a charming letter from him, beginning :

"My dear, dear friend, on whom I count, and whose advice I need in all the confusion that arises when I am away. . . . Your letter is absolutely noble in its high thoughts and expressions ; write to me and give me some useful suggestions. X. is the meanest trickster imaginable, and I mistrust him. As for the Muse, I hear nothing of her, as I refused to have anything to do with her nursing corps."

On the 27th I received an invitation to lunch at the Hôtel de Bourgogne with Madame Rodin, now back from Italy. She was inexhaustible on the details of her journey. But she was unwell, with

a very bad cold. Their room was overheated and airless, and it upset her, and Rodin would not go back to Meudon. He began drawing after lunch, while Madame Rodin continued her story of the journey. Suddenly she said :

“ I must buy myself two really nice dresses.”

Rodin let his pencil drop.

“ More dresses ! ” he cried. “ But I bought you a costume and a cloak before we left ! We’ve got to economize. You’re very well as you are.”

“ Did I make any objections,” retorted Rose, “ when you gave all your suits to M. M.’s servant ? ”

“ That’s not the same thing,” said Rodin sharply : “ I am I ! I’ve the right to do what I like, but you—that’s another matter.”

“ Well, and suppose I want to be well-dressed, nowadays, like other women ? I’ve got money, I can afford to buy good clothes.”

“ They wouldn’t suit you. And so you’ve got money ? ”

“ Yes, Auguste. I haven’t touched my income

for three years. Also I've got my Savings Bank account."

"All right," said Rodin. "As you've got money, buy yourself some dresses."

And he went on with his drawing.

They gave me some photographs showing them together. Rodin wrote a dedication. Madame Rodin wanted to do the same. Taking the pencil Rodin held out to her, she asked him : "Shall I put 'with my most affectionate and sincere good wishes' ? "

"That's too long, you couldn't," he replied. "Put simply 'Rose.'" And she did so.

A few days later she fell seriously ill. I never left them from morning till night. A doctor of the quarter came and ordered heroin, and she slept for several hours. Lying on her bed she looked as if she were dead. Rodin was so alarmed that he stayed near the bed on his knees, looking as if he had lost his senses. So disquieted was he at her long sleep, that he insisted on waking her. In vain I told him that was the effect of the drugs and

that he must leave her in peace. At last he shook her with all his might. At the end of a few days she asked to be taken to Dr. Vivier, in whom she had great confidence.

On April 5th he told me to meet him at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. I found him upset by his wife's illness and by various affairs he could not manage ; also by the prospect of his journey to Rome ; he was in a shocking bad temper. He dragged me about the shops, buying different things for his journey, but always forgetting something, especially the indispensable things. Over one item which was forgotten he made such a scene and abused me so violently that I grew angry.

" You know, *Maitre*," I said as I left him, " I've had enough. One would have to be an angel to put up with you ; and I'm not one. I shan't see you any more, and I shan't do anything more for you. You're not worth it."

" Shut up," he cried.

" If you don't write and apologize, I shall never come back to you again."

And I went off at a run. Next day I received a card from him with the words : " So sorry. Yours affectionately." Knowing how helpless he would be all alone, I went back to him. He kissed me with a smile, and we said no more about it.

On April 6th he left for Rome.

" I shall have to be there for six weeks," he told me ; " the dates of the sittings are all fixed. If only I can make a success of it ! I've had so little luck with my busts."

" Perhaps he won't be so difficult as M. Clemenceau."

Rodin laughed and repeated what he had so often said : " Clemenceau is of Chinese origin : I discovered it in the conformation of his face. But the Pope is a Roman, and that's not so difficult."

On April 17th I received a letter from Italy, in which he thanked me for my devotion and the care I took of him, and gave me the news of his wife he had just received. He concluded : " Your very happy friend."

Madame Rodin had gone back to Meudon. I

often went to see her, and so did Auguste. She used to write to Rodin, and took as much pains over her letter as a little schoolgirl. She talked of him the whole time. On May 27th he wrote : " I've come back from Rome, where I couldn't do what I wanted. Come on Thursday to the Rue de l'Université ; I shall be very glad to see you."

I found him working at a day study of the Pope.
" And what's our Pope like ? " I asked.

" He's a fool, he wouldn't pose properly. After the third sitting he walked round and round the clay study and said : ' What's that ? ' "

As Rodin said this, in walked M. Jean de Bonnefon. He planted himself before the clay study—it was little more than an outline—and flung up his arms in enthusiasm.

" What a lucky mortal ! He's the only Pope since Clement VII who's had a Michael Angelo for his sculptor ! "

Rodin was greatly flattered, though he vowed he had not done justice to his subject ; he praised the Pope, spoke of his majesty and his acute intelligence.

During this conversation M. Léonce Bénédite entered. It was the first time I had seen him. He was accompanied by Madame Armène Ohanian, a quite charming person ; she took away a rose that Rodin had brought from Meudon for me. Again the Pope was admired, and compliments began afresh, and were only interrupted by the arrival of a dirty old antiquity dealer with silks and Persian miniatures for Rodin.

Rodin was rather disappointed with his reception at the Vatican. He was tired ; the war overawed him, aroused his fears ; as a result he had no inclination to work. He put in just a few appearances at the Hôtel Biron for appointments he had made.

In Italy he had come across two old acquaintances, a lady and her daughter, both artists. He had known the mother a long time, for she used to come to consult him about her drawings. She took much of her inspiration from him, and he thought highly of her work. The daughter, too, was clever enough to find her way into his affections, and after a time he and they became inseparable.

On July 10th, 1916, Rodin had an attack of congestion and fell down on the staircase. He went to bed and refused to receive me. I went to Auguste.

"There's dirty work going on there," he told me.

"I don't know what they're plotting," his wife grumbled. "The old fellow is being used in a way that won't do his health much good. All these creatures with their daughters will make the old woman die of jealousy."

The quartette was composed of Madame B. and her daughter, and Madame G., always dressed in nursing superintendent's uniform, accompanied also by her daughter. Madame G. had obtained permission from Rodin to do a bust of him. The two mothers were enemies ; the two daughters hated each other even more fervently. Apart from them, no one else was ever seen at Meudon.

Poor Madame Rodin found herself pushed into the background like a worn-out drudge. Rodin, on the other hand, who seemed to have lost all will-power, saw and felt nothing but smiles,

mothers' compliments, caresses and kisses from younger lips.

The nursing superintendent, who was said to be an Austrian, but declared herself to be a Russian, had brought a lump of clay and was well advanced with the modelling. Rodin "sat" for her while asleep. Old Rose prowled round model and artist, grumbling and muttering, shaking her fist and clenching her teeth, rolling her eyes like a tortured martyr; but she uttered no complaint aloud, "because all that pleases M. Rodin."

Rodin no longer needed a secretary. The good ladies dealt with all correspondence—that is to say, they wrote solely to their friends or accomplices, sinister actors in the comedy that was being played.

In such a tangled situation, action was needful. I sent Auguste for Madame Rodin. She told me, with profuse gesticulation and many words, that she no longer counted for anything, and that, "M. Rodin simply lived for those ladies."

"I'll smash everything in the place," she cried.

I advised calm and prudence, and promised I would straighten it all out.

"Oh, if only you knew all they do ! Madame G. had almost finished M. Rodin's bust. In comes Madame B., furious at finding her rival ahead of her, and they cursed each other like a couple of fish-wives. Then all of a sudden Madame B. seized the bust and flung it out of the window, then took the other woman by the arms and pushed her out of doors."

"And what did Rodin say ? "

"M. Rodin ? He hardly turned his head. He doesn't seem to understand anything. The two all but had a stand-up fight. I was so frightened that I hid in the cupboard and stopped my ears."

At each intrigue going on round Rodin, I took care to warn his sincere, disinterested friends. Among these I put in the first rank Captain Bigand-Kaire, who lived at Marseilles, and Mademoiselle Judith Cladel ; her I always found ready to act, and to act with discernment, always willing to help in watching over Rodin's interests.

She advised me to go to Meudon every day. I made myself friendly with the four ladies so as to gain a better hold. Mademoiselle Cladel, for her part, asked them to her house and visited them at theirs.

“Something is brewing,” we said to each other.
“But what?”

“If the one turned the other out of the house, it’s because she was in the way, surely?”

“Redouble your watchfulness : I will help you.”

For more than a week I went to Meudon, but without going near Rodin. I walked in the garden, hid in the meadow, and watched the entrance and the garden gate, without being seen. I soon discovered what they were doing. Madame B. and Mademoiselle F. were reading the letters, passing them to each other, and tearing them up when read. Rodin was signing papers that they put in front of him on his table. The last night of the week I sent a boy to warn Auguste. He opened the garden gate for me. His wife said to me :

"There's trickery going on in there and no mistake!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Auguste. "Another word and I'll put you outside the door."

He was furious.

"I'm thirsty, Auguste," I said gently. "Go and get me some beer."

I gave him money and he went.

"I'll tell you what's happening," his wife said to me. "The old mother came to see us last night. She sat down, just there, and said: 'Nini, I'm no longer the only Madame Rodin: there are two heiresses now!'"

She told me that Madame B. had sent for a lawyer, a Maître Thérêt, and Rodin had made his will. He divided everything between his wife and Madame B.—the whole to revert to the survivor.

Now Madame B. was forty, and Madame Rodin was seventy-two!

"That's not a bad stroke," thought I, and I hurried to Mademoiselle Cladel to tell what I had

just heard. We were both of us agitated to the last degree, wondering what could be done.

"Suppose you go and tell M. Peytel?" she suggested.

"He's a banker: he'll think I'm romancing. He won't like these stories."

"We ought to inform the Beaux-Arts."

"I must watch Meudon. Go and see M. Clémentel" (he was Minister at the time). "He's fond of Rodin. Perhaps he can do something."

Mademoiselle Cladel told M. Clémentel; she was the first to see him, and I wish to make it clear that it was she who helped me to save Rodin's fortune, his works of art, and his charming Meudon villa, of which the State is to-day the owner.

On June 24th, 1916, Madame B. wrote to me: "Please believe that you will find a friend in me. Come and see me. Your efforts shall not be in vain."

And Mademoiselle Cladel, on her return from a visit to Meudon, wrote: "I haven't wasted my time there. I found him and Madame Rodin

alone, and she confirmed all you say. The wretches ! Come to-morrow. Be prudent if you see anyone between now and then. Rodin must be watched. They're quite capable of doing him some injury now. What a dreadful business it is ! Don't dine with them any more, they're dangerous."

So the enemy said : " Your efforts shall not be in vain !" and herself helped me to save her victim. When I didn't go to Meudon, I received letters from her.

" I would have preferred a hundred times actually to see you, to hear you talk with your faith, your splendid conviction ! Rodin lunched with me yesterday with Mademoiselle F. To-morrow they are coming again. I expect you any time ; consider my house as the house of a friend. Keep me informed of the health of our dear ones. Come and see me if that will cheer you up a little : you need it, and our conversations are bound to end with a good laugh."

To get anything out of them and keep them unsuspicuous, I had to say all sorts of evil of poor

Madame Rodin, and pretend she had this or that illness which was bringing her every day nearer her grave.

On the other side, to stimulate my zeal, Mademoiselle Cladel wrote : "Come to-morrow. I've news for you. If we don't restore peace at Meudon, they'll kill him. One would think that's what they want."

And then Mademoiselle F. and the other so-called "friends who loved each other like twin sisters," had a quarrel : and Mademoiselle F., one day when I refused to receive her, sent me a letter to be given to Madame Rodin. Here it is :

"*Chérie*, yesterday I was asked to lunch at Madame B.'s. I sent a line to the *Maitre*, begging him postpone his visit because I didn't want him to go without me ; but Madame B., thinking it would please the *Maitre*—or so she says—told the chauffeur to bring him. It's not my doing : I don't want you to think it's me."

Needless to say, I did not inflict all that silly stuff on Madame Rodin.

It seems to me that if Rodin had not known his Balzac, he would have invented him ! For it was all pure Balzac, slices out of the *Comédie Humaine*, with all this riff-raff in their silk dresses, with their complaisant men followers, almost their accomplices. What a haul the police could have made if only we lived in a society that knew how to protect geniuses and great artists, who know so much less of life than business men ! But our great sculptor had no one to protect him but two poor weak women !

CHAPTER XII

THE DONATION *m. Buci*

ON August 2nd, M. Dalimier, Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts, sent for me. He received me cordially. In his office were Messieurs Valentino, Bénédite, and Edmond Guiraud. I gave them an account of all that had happened and told the names of those concerned, also where certain of Rodin's works were.

On August 4th, Messieurs Clémentel, Dalimier and Bénédite came to Meudon with Mademoiselle Cladel. As Rodin was no longer giving me any salary, M. Guiraud, who was M. Dalimier's principal secretary, allotted me a gratuity for the services I had rendered, and I drew a hundred and fifty francs from the Emergency Cash Office. I was informed that pending the settlement of the affair, I should be entitled to draw this sum every month. But a month later one of the officials, M. Mouillé, I think it was, told me that the Beaux-

Arts were not rich, and begged me to pay no further visits to the Cash Department ! So the State gave in all three hundred francs to one whose zeal and devotion has brought it millions !

On August 4th, Mademoiselle Cladel wrote to me :

“ In two days’ time there will be an official watchman at Meudon. You deserve fully as much thanks as I do, but it isn’t thanks we want : all we want is to see Rodin’s great wish carried out. I told M. Clémentel that I did not want the title of curator, which he promised I might have during Rodin’s lifetime. We must respect Rodin’s right of possession to the end. But I was greatly surprised to learn, just now and quite by chance, that they have nominated another director of the Rodin Museum, a man who in the past has opposed the project and who, I fear, through want of understanding, may misinterpret Rodin’s idea. It pained me ; but perhaps it is not definitely settled.”

“ Rodin’s work is saved,” she wrote later. “ I have seen him this afternoon, and I found him a

little better. He seemed quite pleased with the precautions that had been taken. What a relief ! ”

The state of Rodin’s health was very curious. Some days his mind remained almost completely clear the whole day through. He lived in a sort of intellectual lethargy of varying duration. An expression of beatific content lent a certain majesty to his fine face. Then all at once, hey presto ! he would begin counting his fingers, the light would fade out of his eyes, his lip would droop, and he would cease talking.

“ Look at him,” his poor wife would say, “ you see him. He loses his wits.”

It was heartbreaking to watch him ; we broke down and cried.

The Senate took charge of the donation, and their Commission paid several visits to Meudon. Led by M. Linthillac, a fervent admirer of Rodin, the “ experts ” went round the studios. They touched everything, valued everything, and spoke of the generous donor. Linthillac recited Baudelaire and Pierre Louys in front of the Sappho group.

A good many people seemed to have their eyes on the Rodin inheritance. The State was rather perturbed about L. F., but hesitated about asking her in so many words to go.

M. Bénédite wrote to me on December 27th :

" You did well not to come ; you must remain at your post as constantly as possible, especially under present circumstances. The difficulties are multiplying, and I am by no means pleased with the conduct of certain of Rodin's friends. The attitude of M. Fenaille, amongst others, after the courteous and conciliatory overtures I made to him, is quite unwarrantable. As for the dancer, I am preparing a little New Year's surprise to amuse her. I am claiming what she owes, at least what I know she owes, for I am sure she owes a great deal more ! But what I recommend most urgently is that you should allow Rodin to sign nothing at all, except of course for M. Peytel. And to avoid the risk of his being surprised in your absence, you might, without attracting attention, remove the ink-

stand and the pens from the dining-room. It is highly probable that after the measures I am taking, someone may feel tempted to use them. I count on you more than ever."

I wish to put it on record here that M. and Mademoiselle Fenaille were intimate friends of Rodin, and were both highly honourable and upright.

The donation to the State was formally executed on September 13th, 1916, in the presence of Messieurs Clémentel, Dalimier, Peytel, Valentino, and Bénédite, Mademoiselle Cladel and myself, Maître Thérêt, and a registrar, Rodin and his wife, who was now initiated for the first time into Rodin's affairs. The old people were radiant. All the morning I had helped to keep up their eagerness, so overjoyed was I to know that Rodin's real wishes were at last going to be carried out; I could have wept for sheer happiness. After the deed of gift and the names of the signatories had been read out, Rodin—it was one of his good days—asked each of us to choose a drawing or

water-colour as a souvenir of the occasion. They all made a rush—I feel somewhat bitter when I remember their indecent hurry—to grab what they liked best among the hundreds that lay in heaps about the room. Mademoiselle Cladel and I contented ourselves with taking what Rodin gave us.

That day I first heard of a secret Museum which existed in the imagination of Senator Delahaye. This gentleman pictured Rodin as having a pig's snout, so to speak ! Others also, people who have never been near Rodin, had the same idea, echoing the opinion of various impostors who had a grudge against the master because they had never been able to extort anything from him. I was amazed to find most of these officials so lacking in artistic taste. They walked about among the superb works of art, arguing just like a band of dealers depreciating the values. Some of them questioned me about Rodin, but I did not answer. To please them I should have had to tell them, I suppose, that Rodin was a libertine, to talk about that secret museum which excited their fancy !

Rodin and a secret Museum ! Sheer nonsense ! He may have been sensual, but no one had a greater purity of soul—and not only purity but timidity. Women used to run after him and try to tempt him in every possible way. I should have liked them to have heard him telling me of the disgust he felt for such women and their ways.

And that was the man about whom these slanderers—ignorant, witless, or liars—invented the legend of the secret Museum ! Poor Rodin !

On their return from La Goulette, another property given by Rodin to the State, they found him in the big studio.

“ Gentlemen,” cried Dalimier, pointing to the master, “ there’s a man who in another fortnight will be the poorest man in France ! ”

His work no longer belonged to him, but it was saved, and that was the principal thing.

Hitherto no one had troubled about Rodin. Where were all those “ dear friends of forty years’ standing ? ” The State is perfectly well aware that it was to Mademoiselle Cladel and myself, to our

sincere affection for Rodin, our admiration for his art, our honesty and our devotion, so keenly criticized but never denied, that they owe not merely the work of art, but the furniture, the souvenirs, and many other things not included in the first deed of gift.

But it seems to me that the State, instead of yielding to the importunities of Rodin's family, which had never done anything for him, ought to have recompensed those who, unknown and obscure, helped him towards fame, those collaborators who are now old, poor, forgotten ; M. Lebossé, to-day crippled with rheumatism, old Fossé, Mathet, Aubert, Despiau, and many others whose names escape me ! Had Rodin not lost his grasp of realities, he would have remembered those faithful and deserving friends. Often had he said to me :

“ I shall not forget any of those who have helped me so faithfully.”

But Rodin died before his death.

Then, with the title of “ authorized agent ”

and empowered to act for Rodin, arrived M. Léonce Bénédite. But who had given him that title? He took possession of the house, the studios, the works of art, and did many things never contemplated by the master.

One day Rodin came into the big studio, which had always been kept in perfect order, to find a removal in progress.

"Who gave orders for all this?" he asked his second cousin, Mademoiselle Coltat.

Paul Cruet, his moulder, stepped forward. But seeing that Rodin was overcome with grief, his eyes full of tears, I came forward and reassured him, explaining that it was for his Museum, calming him as best I could. But I raged to see his grief; I was furious with them for not letting their great sculptor die in peace with his works around him. M. Bénédite, however, kept repeating: "It can't be helped. The Rodin Museum must be opened next April according to the agreement, to enable Rodin to be present."

But I had been assured that Rodin would not

live through the winter, and I considered that it would have been better to leave him in peace. His tears had affected me so greatly that I asked M. Clémentel if it was true that M. Bénédite had been invested with power to act for Rodin. I begged him to tell me who had appointed him Rodin's agent and what exactly were his powers.

"He has no powers at all," said M. Clémentel, quite frankly.

On that I flatly refused to obey M. Bénédite. We had two violent scenes at Meudon, and I repeated what M. Clémentel had told me. I promised all the same to supervise the moving of certain works of art in the interests of sculpture ; but I would not allow anything to be done that would worry the master or his old wife. Thus I made an enemy of M. Bénédite, but little I cared for that. I had a host of enemies already in the birds of prey who had surrounded Rodin and, thanks to my vigilance, had been prevented from plundering him.

"She's a terror," said M. Bénédite of me : "a

terror ! ” But I was simply a lover of Rodin, no more.

As the donation had been accepted, there was no need to move the marbles and bronzes in such haste. They were as safe at Meudon as at the Hôtel Biron. Besides, three Government watchmen relieved each other in turn.

Poor Madame Rodin hated their being there. She used to go to Rodin in tears and complain, but he could not understand. I soothed her anxiety by explaining the good intentions of the State, the safety of the works of art, and so on.

“ What about me ? ” said Auguste. “ What am I going to get ? To give millions to the State while their son hasn’t even a decent pair of trousers ! ”

I replied that the State would forget no one. In point of fact, the State pays Auguste an income out of his father’s money, calculated at three per cent on a hundred thousand francs : not excessive, is it ? I stood as guarantee for everyone, for the Ministers, for the relatives, for the friends.

"I shall make a row," clamoured Auguste ; and his wife vowed I had been "sold !"

I used to go to bed night after night with a racking headache. It was terrible to watch Rodin growing weaker. And when I saw him wiping the picture frames or rubbing the bronze busts with his handkerchief, for hours on end, it cut me to the heart, and I would say to myself : " You have drawn too much on your strength, and you are now fighting a force too great for you."

My fiancé came back from the war and was stationed at Meudon. Rodin and his wife loved him at once. But when he saw the thankless task forced on me by my love for the two old people, he was deeply distressed, and made arrangements for our marriage, which was fixed for December 2nd.

CHAPTER XIII

RODIN'S MARRIAGE—AND MORE INTRIGUES

PREPARATIONS were now being made for the marriage of Rodin with his faithful old comrade, Marie-Rose Beuret, and the drawing up of the contract was engaging our attention. The little ceremony had been arranged : it was to be quite private, and because of the feeble health of the old couple, the marriage was to be solemnized in the drawing-room of *Les Brillants*.

" If I invest what I have, as they want me to do, will it go to my heir after me ? " Madame Rodin asked me. " I've got an heir ! I've saved for him, penny by penny, and with what M. Rodin gave me two years ago it makes a good sum. I'll show it to you."

Her distrust was awake once more. She had little faith in her marriage contract.

" You can consult M. Peytel and M. Clémentel

quite freely," I said. "They have done everything to safeguard your interests."

She made me repeat this several times. I took the opportunity of telling her of M. Bénédite's wish to be one of her witnesses at the wedding. She consented to that. I did not know that she had already suggested it to Mademoiselle Cladel.

"An admirable work remains to be accomplished," M. Bénédite wrote to me on January 2nd, "a glorious monument to be erected for the honour of France on the day of victory itself. I have devoted myself to it in an entirely disinterested spirit. I look for the same spirit in those who must aid me in this ; and I have no doubt that you, with your high ideals and your devotion to the Master, will co-operate with me, zealously and with ardour. I will see you on Thursday, till when be on the alert."

On January 6th he informed me that M. Clémentel was coming to Meudon.

"Watch for his arrival, try to see him before anyone else does, and tell him what you have to

tell. It is the subsequent arrangements that are troubling us. It is urgently necessary to consider these from now onwards."

This suggestion savoured too much of the detective to please me, and I said nothing to M. Clémentel.

One morning a gentleman arrived at Les Brillants, bearing a huge bouquet of flowers and a bottle of wine. He gave me his card and asked to see "his dear old friend Rodin and Rodin's charming wife." I read on the card : "M. de P.," president of this, member of various other things, and other titles that filled up the whole of the pasteboard. The affectionate tone of his voice as he spoke of Rodin, coupled with his assurance, induced me to yield to his desire.

"Rodin is not well just now," I said. "He sees scarcely anyone : the doctors forbid it."

"Ah ! you are Madame Martin !" he exclaimed. "Pray forgive my not having recognized you at once. But I saw you whenever I called at the Hôtel Biron."

I looked at him and was sure I had never seen him before. Rodin consented to receive him, and he went into the small drawing-room. When he saw Rodin, he embraced him warmly and sat down by his side. I sat down opposite them.

" My dear friend, what a long time it is since those Thursdays at our friend Rayne's ? You remember what fast friends we were ? "

At the name of Rayne, Rodin smiled but said nothing. I was watching the visitor, and I noticed that he was watching me.

" I am delighted, my dear friend, to see that you've kept Madame Martin with you. She is an angel of devotion and sincerity ! "

" Oh ! " said I to myself, " he has need of me ! He's flattering me ! "

Rodin looked at me and replied : " She's mine."

I had often remarked that people who came with the intention of getting the better of Rodin used to pay me compliments so as to gain my good graces or my alliance. I received few compliments of the kind, for Rodin's real friends had no need of my services.

"Rodin and I, dear lady, have been friends for thirty years and more. I've done him great services."

"Thirty years!" I said to myself. "And I never set eyes on him till to-day!"

But all who attempted to get access to Rodin during his illness proclaimed themselves to be "friends of thirty years' standing." Even M. Bénédite said to Rodin one day: "For thirty years, dear friend, I have waited for the day, now at last here, when I might work for your glory." And Rodin had said to me, "Do you know that gentleman?" "I've only seen him here during the last few weeks," was my reply. "Well, I don't know him," said Rodin, looking at M. Bénédite, who was walking away with Rudier the founder.

The Curator of the Luxembourg Museum had till then only had dealings with Rodin at long and infrequent intervals; and never had Rodin considered him as an intimate friend. Bénédite used to address Rodin as *cher Monsieur* in their occasional correspondence.

To return to M. de P. He talked to Rodin about all sorts of projects, amongst others of a scheme for a country house for disabled soldiers with pretty nurses to look after them and Rodin himself as their constant visitor. That placed M. de P. in my list. Yet another of those who only knew Rodin from the silly stories spread about by disappointed models. M. de P. came to Meudon again several times, hoping to return to the subject, but I would not let him see the Master. One morning he gave me for Rodin's signature a letter making over to him the reproduction rights of a work of which he possessed the plaster cast ; it was called "The Miner." I said I would mention it to M. Bénédite, who was in charge of Rodin's affairs and works of art. He launched forth into abuse of M. Bénédite, whom he said he had known for many years, calling him "a barmaid's son" ; and gave Rodin a biography of him that did little credit to the Curator of the Luxembourg. Although M. Bénédite had shown little enough consideration for me, I did not tell him what I had heard. And

I did not let Rodin write any letter about those rights of reproduction.

A few days later M. de P. returned to the attack, made me a long speech and finally handed me a deed purporting to be written by Rodin granting the reproduction rights ; but, with a view to getting rid of my scruples, he had added, "I undertake to pay to Madame Martin the sum of a thousand francs as commission on every reproduction sold." Rodin was to add "read and approved," with his signature. While I read this document, without comment, M. de P. expatiated on the thousand-franc commissions and how they would enhance my married life, ensure me a competence, and so on. I resolved that I would shut the door on the "interested" friend, and I gave the document to M. Bénédite, who told me, later, that he had summoned M. de P. before a magistrate ; but they never asked for my evidence, which rather surprised me !

M. de P. had written to Rodin and told him he wished to make him a present of a picture. Rodin

wanted to see the picture, and it was arranged that I should go and fetch it from the Rue le l'Université, where the donor resided. I went there on December 2nd, on my way to the Town Hall for my marriage. M. de P. gallantly presented me with a bouquet of flowers and his good wishes, and asked for the document.

"*Cher Monsieur,*" I replied, "you can imagine that people forget business when they are on their way to be married. I will see to it in a few days."

And I carried off the famous picture. Oh ! that picture ! I was late in arriving at the *café* where the witnesses and a few friends were waiting for me. Victor Snell humorously insisted on seeing the picture which encumbered me. It was a painting in the Dutch manner representing a licentious orgy, a sorry exhibition of sexual perversion. I was very embarrassed at the thought of appearing before his Worship the Mayor with an encumbrance which had been the subject of various jests that displeased my husband, so we left it at the *café*, calling for it late in the evening. The next

day, when I gave it to Rodin, I made him laugh heartily with the tale of my adventures. It did my heart good to see the poor old man understand a little of what I said and laugh at it, but he looked at the picture without comment. His wife made a grimace.

Some years earlier Rodin had bought from an antiquity dealer a set of Japanese cartoons representing "The School of Love." It was a series of pictorial instruction designed to teach young wedded folk how to love each other without Daphnis and Chloe's need of consultation and advice. I looked at them gravely as Rodin unrolled them.

"How do they impress you?" he asked.

"Very greatly."

"Ah! tell me your impression then."

"I note that the Japanese are a sensible race, less degenerate than ourselves, since they give pictures like this to a young girl who is about to be married and so teach her to satisfy the senses as well as the mind of the man she has chosen."

"You're right," Rodin replied. "They would certainly be less ignorant after seeing them."

"Yes, but at the same time they would lose that charm of emotion and confusion known to Occidentals, who prefer to grope and guess rather than to be told. When an illusion falls to the ground, it always shatters with violence."

He carried the cartoons off to Meudon. Was the possession of them enough to inspire the tale of a secret Museum? I have made a point of recording this incident so as to throw the fullest possible light on the scandal.

On January 13th, Bénédite was to the fore again.

"I recommend the keenest and most active watchfulness just now in respect of the dancer. She intends to try and obtain a signature of which she is greatly in need in order to free herself. I have a paper which proves it. Coach Madame Rodin in her part; but the best course is to deny her entrance altogether."

When I told this to Madame Rodin she was extremely angry. "It's going too far," she cried, "to stop my receiving whomever I like. Mademoiselle F. is my friend: she has always been nice

to me. She never comes to see me without bringing something for me." However, she gave way.

It was bitterly cold. It was impossible to get coal anywhere. There were plenty of promises, but scanty fulfilment. We had little enough for ourselves, and we had also to find fuel for the watchman. He was there simply and solely to keep an eye on all visitors, but he was sorry for the two poor old people, and he chopped wood for them from morning till night. I applied to the Government for coal, and was promised it by the ton ; but it came in hundred-weights and very few of those. Madame Rodin felt the cold acutely. We all had colds.

We were getting the big drawing-room ready for the marriage and arranging a buffet. Madame Rodin asked me to get some of Rodin's linen and other things that had been left at the Hôtel Biron. M. Bénédite told us to bring a good-sized trunk, and Auguste went into Paris with my husband. They were to bring, amongst other things, a table-cloth, as we had nothing at Meudon except small

afternoon tea-cloths. But when they got to the Hôtel Biron, the guardian flung up his arms and kept them at the door.

"Do you think M. Bénédite is going to give away his table-cloths?" he asked.

Eventually he brought two shirts, a pair of sheets, an old hat and an old frock coat.

"Is that all?" asked Auguste.

"Oh, well!" said the watchman, "everybody's been helping themselves, more or less."

Madame Rodin was loud in her protests when she saw what they had brought. As I had looked after things at the Hôtel Biron, I knew fairly accurately what linen Rodin had and how many handkerchiefs.

By January 28th, everything was ready for the wedding. Miss O'Connor, the Countess Greffuhle's secretary, Mademoiselle Cladel and myself, aided by the watchman, had arranged the room for the ceremony. We were just looking at the effect of it all when a formidable explosion made the house shake, breaking some of the glass

panes in the big studio. It was a factory at Puteaux that had blown up.

Misfortunes never come singly. The frost caused the pipes of the central heating, which had not been in use because we had not sufficient fuel, to burst, and the drawing-room was flooded with water. My husband suggested improvising some sort of heating with the moulds from the studio. We were only able to use two, and even then the result was very uncertain. And one of the chimneys was blocked.

However, we did what we could. Rodin and his old sweetheart, huddled up against one another with a rug over their knees, looked like a pair of the little lovebirds supposed to be inseparable. They were half-dead with cold. We were distressed beyond measure. I tried to cheer them up by laughing.

"I'd have been surprised if all went smoothly," I said, "that's not Rodin's luck ! There's always a breakdown somewhere at the last moment."

"It's always been like that in my life," agreed Rodin.

We put them to bed, poor things, to keep them warm.

Meanwhile, Auguste and his wife Nini were panting with excitement.

"It's for to-morrow," said Auguste. "I shall no longer be a bastard, and a poor man. We shall see if they do their duty. To-morrow, Nini, I shall be able to say, 'I've a father and mother like everyone else.'"

"Don't worry," Nini answered. "You're deaf, but I can hear all right! If they don't say anything about us, then let them look out! You know what you've got to do, Auguste?"

I managed, with a good deal of trouble, to get Auguste to go out with me, and I explained to him that in spite of his parents' great and just wish, they could not give him the name of Rodin on account of his age.

"You're in league with them," he cried. "You're no better than the rest! They've paid you to say that. But wait—you'll see!"

When my husband came in he took Auguste on one side and told him how to act.

Musée Rodin Meudon Juillet 1920

A M^e Marcelle Tirel

Ma chère Amie

T'ai lu avec un grand plaisir tes
lettres sur mon frère et ma mère
Auguste Rodin et Rose Rodin. Ces
nous dessinent avec une exactitude
et une vérité qui te font honneur

Je t'en félicite et t'imbrasse

Bon ami

A Beuret
Auguste Gravé

Élève et fils de Rodin

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER FROM AUGUSTE BEURET,
RODIN'S SON, TO MADAME MARCELLE TIREL

"Believe me, you'd better say nothing. You could only do yourself harm. There is still time for them to disinherit you and turn you out without a penny. You can believe me."

This argument had more effect on Nini than all the rest. All the same, she was furious.

"We'll see to-morrow."

On the morning of the great day I went to see Rodin.

"There's a woman who's thinking of marriage to-day," he said to his Rose.

"Yes, *ma vieille*. Everything comes to those who wait," I told her.

"Do you remember, *ma vieille*, when you used to beat me and say 'you shall give in, *sale garce*, you shall give in ! ' "

"Oh ! Madame Rodin," I expostulated, "this isn't the day for such memories ! "

"I never said that," declared Rodin smiling.

They laughed, and I kept up their spirits with my own gaiety.

Miss O'Connor and Mademoiselle Cladel were

the first to arrive, accompanied by a charming young girl who was to put the finishing touches to Madame Rodin's toilette. Madame Rodin was quite agreeable, but she flatly refused to let a powder puff come anywhere near her face.

"I've never done that yet," she said to Miss O'Connor.

Then came the cousins. Of all of them I only knew M. Henri Cheffer, a charming little man, very simple. He was the only one I had ever seen at Rodin's whom they seemed to like, with the exception of Mademoiselle Henriette, whom I had noticed once at Meudon. None of Rodin's relatives ever came to the Hôtel Biron. Last of all the Ministers and the witnesses arrived. M. Bénédite brought the Deputy-Mayor of Meudon.

Auguste and his wife came in; no one but myself knew why they looked so ill at ease. Nini was given a piece of lace and a pair of gloves to round off her toilette. I sat down beside them when they had taken their places, for in spite of everything, with their uncertain characters,

I did not feel very sure of what they might say. Rodin looked on and received everyone with a cordial *cher ami*; he was as happy as a king, eyeing the buffet, which was stacked with pastries and cakes.

The ceremony then took place. Rodin and the woman he was about to marry had confided to me that they had promised one another they would say something nice to the Mayor. But when the psychological moment arrived, their memory failed them and they said no more than "Yes." Rodin listened to the reading of the articles of the marriage contract. M. Dalimier turned to Mademoiselle Cladel and murmured something, laughing in his beard, when the Mayor spoke of fidelity between husband and wife. It was all quite brief and intimate, and no one noticed Auguste's pallor when his wife said to him :

"They've said nothing about you."

I shepherded them towards the other guests to prevent them making inopportune remarks, then kissed Rodin and his wife.

"What a fine thing you have just done, *cher Maître !*" I said.

But his mind was wandering ; he did not seem to know what was going on. "Yes, I'm happy," he replied. "I've just opened my Museum."

"Well, are you pleased now, Henriette ?" Madame Rodin said to Mademoiselle Henriette. "You wanted this marriage so badly."

"Yes, I'm very pleased," replied the cousin.

When everyone had gone, we found that the cook had forgotten about lunch, and we had to improvise a meal. Mademoiselle Cladel and Miss O'Connor stayed with Rodin and his wife, while I went off with Auguste and Nini. They stopped at every corner and told everyone that nothing had been done for Auguste ; their hearers sympathized indignantly and abused poor Rodin and his wife. Auguste suddenly burst out crying like a child and would not have any lunch.

On January 30th, 1917, I came quite early to see my newly-wedded couple.

"You see, it's only when they're worn out that

people leave great artists to their wives," Madame Rodin declared. (I may say here in parenthesis that she could have been married long before, but she always refused on account of her jealousy. As I hinted earlier in the book, she had been much afraid of Mademoiselle Camille C.) She pointed to her husband who was lying in bed, smiling as he counted his fingers one after the other. When he got up, he began wiping the picture-frames with his handkerchief.

"So you are doing the housework, dear *Maitre*," I said.

He did not even turn round. He rubbed and rubbed, his lip drooping. I went away with a lump in my throat. That morning two cousins, Mademoiselle Coltat and Madame Jacquart, her sister, called, but they hardly stayed five minutes. After they had gone, Madame Rodin was irritated, and said : "Now I'm going to assert my rights. Ah ! I shan't be so silly as he was and give things away to everyone."

The days that followed were peaceful. As there was so little coal available and they felt the cold so

keenly, they stayed in bed from morning till night.

They held one another's hands, from his bed to hers, smiling as they talked of their life of hardship and their young days. It was a quaintly novel honeymoon. I went every day and amused them with stories I had been told by different people. Madame Rodin welcomed visitors. She simpered as she lay fully clothed in white knitted woollen things under a yellow silk coverlet. She did not care for women callers. She admitted that she greatly appreciated the practice I had carefully observed for the last two days of kissing only her when I came in, simply shaking hands with her husband, whereas before I used to kiss them both.

Rodin had set apart one room for his personal use. There he kept his private papers, his "Thoughts," and his money. It was in that room we found his family papers. The arrangement of the letters and photographs had been seen to by Rodin and a Japanese, a cabinet-maker by trade, who could not talk any French. Rodin used him simply because he was always silent and did not disturb him.

I visited this stronghold for the first time in the company of Rodin, M. Clémentel, and M. Bénédite. I remember that M. Clémentel found, in a drawer in the desk, a sheet of tracing paper covered with drawings, tentative studies and sketches.

“ It’s pure Michael Angelo ! ” he said to Rodin, who promptly wrote upon the paper *à mon cher ami M. Clémentel*, dated and signed it. Meanwhile, M. Bénédite was looking through the files and sorting out such letters as might be useful to him.

Madame Rodin who, to use her own expression, “ never said anything,” used to talk a great deal when we were alone. In this way I learnt, without any intention of so doing, many little matters in which the new-comers had irritated her.

She had no faith in the authorities. She secretly gave her son various stamped documents, also the title deeds of a property which Rodin had bought for her for fifty thousand francs and which the authorities thought belonged to him.

“ I’ll tell you all I’ve done,” she used to say to me.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEATH OF MADAME RODIN

MADAME RODIN had a bad cough. Her physician, Dr. Godefroy, gave her quantities of lozenges and syrups and paid countless visits.

On the morning of February 13th she seemed fairly well. I exhorted her to take all possible care of herself and to make the most of this improvement, but when, later in the day, Mademoiselle Henriette Coltat and M. Bénédite came to see her, she talked to them quite calmly of her approaching end and her last wishes, and spoke very kindly of all her family down in Champagne.

"I don't the least mind dying," she said, "but it's leaving that poor man ! Who's going to look after him ? What's going to become of him ? He's an unlucky man."

The poor woman had always had the idea that it would be she who would bury Rodin.

"Afterwards," she used to say, "I shall leave

this house and go and live all alone in my little cottage in the middle of the garden. But," she added, "I want to carry on right to the end."

When M. Bénédite and her cousin had left, I went back to her bedside.

" You know," she said, " I've got an heir. It would be stupid to listen to all those people who don't care for me. You shall tell me if I've done the right thing."

I knew how changeable the Rodins were. They were both impulsive to the last degree, but they both had the caution inherent in peasant-folk ; they would promise anything when one was with them, then reflection would bustle out one idea after another, and they would eventually do exactly the contrary, or else nothing at all, always putting off their business till later.

On the 14th I arrived at about a quarter to nine. Madame Rodin was dying. When she saw me, she stammered : " Atin . . . Atin. . . ." I understood that she wanted to say " Madame Martin." I kissed her.

"The doctor will soon be here, dear Madame Rodin. He will calm you—cure you."

When Rodin was ill, there was oxygen in quantities. If only there had been some to relieve her ! I held her hands and stayed by her, between the two beds. Rodin was still in bed, but with his body half out ; his head emerged from the pillows just as the head of his "*Pensée*" emerges from its marble block. His face wore an air of stupor mingled with dread and curiosity so profound that his wide-open red-rimmed eyes were terrifying. They were fixed on me, and before a face so fearfully convulsed I was seized with inexplicable panic ; I trembled, did not dare to utter a word—not that I could have found a word to say ! And my silence intensified that silence of fear, rent only by the rattle of the dying woman's breath.

Rodin stretched out his hand, and I found the strength to whisper : "Don't be frightened, *mon cher Maître*. The doctor is coming. He will calm her. Don't be frightened."

He made no answer. His lips moved, his

eyes seemed to start out of his head, his mouth drooped.

Trembling I watched the two faces, contracted the one by the death agony, the other by fright. I dared not go, my throat seemed choked up, and I felt on the point of bursting into sobs. Presently I escaped and ran to tell Auguste. He was drawing water from the well. I told his wife what was happening, and pointed out that a son's place was by the bedside of his dying mother. Auguste went in to see his parents. He came back five minutes later.

"Mother's in a bad way," he said, "but she's tenacious of life."

He refused to go back. After fruitless efforts to persuade him I adopted what sounds an idiotic expedient. Knowing that he believed firmly in fortune-telling by cards, I took a pack and pretended to tell his fortune, insisting that he was going to have a loss by death. I was repeating with emphasis : "Yes, a death, a death," when at about half-past twelve the nurse came in.

“ Come quick, Monsieur Auguste ! ”

Madame Rodin was dead.

“ Come on, bustle ! ” cried Auguste’s wife ;
“ she’s gone : hurry up ! ”

I went into the room. Rodin was standing in the middle of the room, looking like a statue. I kissed him without a word.

“ I’m all alone,” he said in a low voice, tears running down his face.

I whispered such comfort as I could, but I knew he could not hear me. And here I must say that many seemingly silly sayings of Rodin were due to that touch of innocent vanity—that he was deaf and tried to conceal it. Often it was remarked that he answered at cross purposes ; but no one ever guessed the reason. How many times I have repeated a question put to him in order that he might give a proper reply ! And it was perhaps because I seemed not to notice that he was deaf, and simply raised my voice a little when I spoke to him, that I had, so to speak, the ear of Rodin.

"Madame Tirel," said the nurse, "my work here is finished. Do whatever you wish."

I went to get a white dress and helped Auguste's wife to dress the old lady in it. Rodin sat beside Auguste, who was crying, and watched us.

I took her handbag which was lying on the bed and gave it to Rodin, then led the poor old man into the garden, while they carried her into the big drawing-room. As we walked, we spoke of her. I noted from his answers that he was in a state of partial lucidity. He even related a few memories of his young days with his wife, tales she had also told me ; his account agreed with hers even to the last detail.

"When we were living in the Rue de Bourgogne after the war, Rose was ill. She had a bad knee and couldn't move : she had to keep it stretched out on a chair all day. Vivier was looking after her. We weren't rich then ! To give her a surprise, I collected together all the half-franc pieces I could save and put them away in a drawer. The day the rent was due, Rose was lamenting that she

couldn't pay it. So then I gave her all the half-franc pieces. How pleased she was!"

That reminded me of the bag she always carried hanging on her arm—the bag I had given to Rodin.

"Let's look and see what's in it, *Maitre*," I said.

He opened it. It contained, besides bills and various papers of no interest, an envelope full of bank notes. This I took out and slipped into the inside pocket of his overcoat, telling him not to let anyone take it away from him.

When we went into the villa again, the servant and the nurse were explaining to Auguste that his mother had left money and some shares to Mademoiselle Henriette. The servant vowed that those were her last words. Before Auguste's indifference and my complete contempt for such sordid questions of interest, they held their tongues. Mademoiselle Henriette arrived at about two o'clock. The servant was on the look-out for her and told her she had come too late.

"It can't be! It can't be! Good God!"

And my poor cousin told me—she particularly wanted to speak to me this morning.”

She did not untie her veil, did not ask where her cousin was laid, just listened to the servant, who began again that story of the money and the shares which were now hers and which were in the desk. I sat down in front of it, next to Rodin, who held my hand. Mademoiselle Coltat came up to me and said in a sharp tone :

“ Kindly collect all that belonged to Madame Rodin.”

“ I have not authority to do that, Mademoiselle Coltat : I am in Rodin’s service and not in that of Madame Rodin. Her affairs are no business of mine, and I shall touch nothing. Moreover, her son is here ; this concerns him and no one else.”

I thereby made an enemy of Mademoiselle Henriette, who often reproached me later for my “gross dishonesty” that day. But in the face of my uncompromising refusal, she did not insist.

I telephoned to M. Peytel and M. Bénédite. The latter was the first to arrive. They all made

a rush for him, and began telling him of Madame Rodin's dying wishes with regard to her cousin, all talking together. Rodin, now clear-eyed, watched them without a word. But no notice was taken of him.

M. Bénédite, Mademoiselle Coltat and Auguste sat down before the open desk and made an inventory of its contents.

There were shares and bonds, gold and silver, both French and foreign, amounting in all to a total of twenty thousand francs. M. Bénédite shut the desk again, locked it, and put the keys in his trousers pocket ; then he set about the formalities.

His disposal of the keys did not escape the notice of Auguste's wife. "Tell me, Marcellle, is M. Rodin's 'curator' also 'curator' for Auguste Beuret as well ?"

"I don't know," I replied. "But he acts with such an air of authority that—"

"Just wait a minute. I'm going to speak to Auguste."

The nurse asked M. Bénédite who was going to

provide the money for the household expenses. "I don't know," he replied. "Perhaps Madame Tirel, who has been attached to the household so long, might see to that."

"Thank you ; I would rather not !" I retorted quickly. "These money questions are in too delicate a state, and I don't wish to undertake any responsibility beyond what I already have undertaken for Rodin."

I have mentioned that Rodin had some money in the pocket of his overcoat. He would not let them take it from him, but I persuaded him to lend it to me that we might see how much there was. M. Bénédite counted it—two thousand one hundred francs. "You must take charge of that," he said.

I took three hundred francs, and thenceforward it was I who used to go to the Bank and sign for Rodin. He did not like not having money in his pocket, and sometimes I made him happy by placing some in his purse.

A little incident occurred one morning which amused us all. Rodin had managed to slip into

the garden alone, and there he met a local postman who had set up as a wine merchant. The man, who knew who Rodin was, but did not know that he was ill, asked if he had any empty bottles to sell.

“ Certainly, *mon ami!* ” said Rodin eagerly ; and he made the bargain there and then, asking thirty-five francs. The man carried off the bottles, and I took the money to Rodin and joked with him about his clever business deal, which pleased him immensely. And he was still more happy when, seeing him turning the notes over in his hand, I made him a present of a note case which I had just bought for myself.

Madame Rodin had been carried into the big drawing-room. She lay there, looking as though she were asleep. Rodin wished to see her. He bent over her, kissed her forehead, then looked at her for a long time and murmured :

“ Beautiful ! . . . beautiful as an antique ! ” Then he went back into his room. In a tone so sad that it brought the tears to my eyes, he said :

"I'm all alone now. My poor wife thought I should be the first to go. Life is a mysterious thing," he added in a low tone : "we pass our lives studying it, and we go without having understood it."

Two tears ran down into his beard, and his eyelids were red for over a month.

M. Bénédite took his departure. I promised to watch by Madame Rodin with her son. Mademoiselle Henriette excused herself, saying she had a touch of influenza. She kissed Auguste very kindly and called him "*mon petit cousin.*"

"I can't understand it at all," Auguste said to me. "I'm the cousin of my cousins, who are recognized by the law as Rodin's cousins ; yet, by the same law, I'm the son neither of my mother nor of my father ! If you had listened to my father, you would now be Madame Beuret, and you would protect me."

"*Mon vieux,*" I answered, "if I had married you, I should first of all, have called myself Madame Rodin, for I should have had our marriage at the same time as your parents had theirs. And then

I would have turned all those people out of the house and we should have lived happily together all the four of us, like the people in the Bible. Only here's the rub ! I didn't listen to your father. I married a man whose origin was not so high, but by no means so embarrassing as yours ! But I don't like these calculations, and I would rather change the subject."

The body had been conveyed to the garage, which had been turned into a mortuary chapel for the occasion. Rodin wished to see it, but the nurse, a Russian, would not let him.

"I want to see my wife," he implored. But she still refused.

Then Rodin burst into a wild fury. His face was so contorted by frenzied anger as to be almost unrecognizable ; he looked like a raging lion. He raised his hand to strike the nurse. I came up just as she was pushing him back roughly.

"What's this ? what's this ? What's the matter, *cher Maître* ? "

When he saw me, he calmed down and his

features relaxed. The nurse explained to me what he wanted, but absolutely forbade me to let him go out of the house. She locked the door and put the key in her pocket.

"So that's the way you look after Rodin," I cried, "by thwarting him in everything?"

She then put the key back in the door, cowed by my determined attitude. I threw over Rodin's shoulders the fur I had on my own and took his hand.

"Come, *cher Maître*," I said. I led him into the empty garage, where the flowers that had fallen from the funeral wreaths lay strewn about the floor.

"Poor Madame Rodin," I said, "when you lost her, you lost all!"

He took my hands in his with a look so full of grief that I added : "I will never leave you, *cher Maître*; I will have strength for you."

He clasped me in his arms. "She was good, wasn't she? And you loved her, didn't you?"

"Such comrades are rare. But you must realize this clearly; she suffered terribly towards the end, and it was a merciful deliverance for her."

"It was I who gave her her illness," he said.

Madame Rodin had suffered for years from bronchial catarrh. The cold brought on a sudden aggravation of her malady, and I may truthfully assert that it was the bitter winter that killed her.

Rodin visited the garage several times a day, but it seemed as if he were studying the body, admiring it, rather than suffering. But his eyes were rimmed with red ; that was his manner of weeping.

When the coffin was brought on the sixth day, Rodin, whose mind happened to be absolutely clear, wished his son to lay his mother in it.

"It's your duty, Auguste," he said, simply.

He looked on without the quiver of a muscle on his fine face, his head inclined forward. But when the cover was screwed on, he turned his head away.

He now seemed to draw closer to his son. His need of affection caused him to speak more gently to Auguste than formerly. Several times indeed he called him *mon enfant*. He invited him to lunch every day, asked him to bring his engravings,

gave him advice about them, criticized or approved them. In short, he took more interest in his son than ever before. Yet another unexpected element was maturing about an affection that might have been so beautiful.

The burial took place on February 19th. Rodin followed the coffin, accompanied by Auguste. There were very few people present. M. Bénédite, who had taken sole charge of the arrangements, had not announced either the day or the hour. I remained at the villa with instructions to give no details to the Press.

"Yet another chapter of Balzac closed," I said to M. Dalimier, who had come to represent the Minister.

"It's curiously like a farce," he answered : "a screaming farce."

"The last chapter will be the most typical, and no doubt the saddest," I replied.

"It can only be a comedy," said M. Dalimier. Madame Rodin was temporarily laid in the vault at Meudon and remained there for six months.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST MONTHS

THE day after the funeral, Rodin's two cousins installed themselves, fairly and squarely, in the villa and, so to speak, took over its entire management. They certainly criticized everything. Yet M. Peytel and M. Clémentel, who seemed to be more sincere than any in their affection for Rodin, had said to Auguste, in the presence of M. Bénédite :

“ Auguste, you must move into the villa and live there with your father.”

And M. Clémentel had added, to M. Bénédite :

“ We must help Auguste.”

To which M. Bénédite had replied :

“ He has no truer friend than myself.”

Auguste had lunch two days running with his father. By the third he had had enough of the company of his cousins, and waited for them to go before he would come again to see his father.

Nini was an awkward presence for these good

ladies. I, who had lived as it were a part of Rodin's life, with full knowledge of all his affairs, knew how to amuse and distract him when anyone was boring him, and I used to talk to him with a freedom of speech that perhaps surprised newcomers. I took no pains to hide my affection for him, and this seemed to arouse their suspicion, to be accounted to me for a crime. Moreover, I dared to tell people to their face what I thought. Knowing my sincerity, Rodin himself appreciated my frankness, and would only smile indulgently when I gave him a piece of my mind.

In the past I had only heard of Mademoiselle Henriette Coltat through some story of an operation of which Rodin had paid the expenses ; his wife had given me the details while I was reading the patient's letter of thanks. Mademoiselle Coltat seldom came to see him, and her visits were very brief in view of the cool welcome she received. In 1915, when she wrote asking for a loan to enable her to go and recuperate in the country, Madame Rodin had said to Rodin :

" You give it ! It's your family ; mine never asks you for anything."

After Madame Rodin's death, Mademoiselle Coltat came to Meudon every day, accompanied sometimes by an old lady. With a view to prevent her taking up her quarters there altogether, Auguste had locked up the rooms in which his mother had lived and where she kept her wardrobe and personal effects. The aspect of these rooms was quite picturesque. The large cupboards were empty, and on the floor and on the chairs were piled her clothes, dresses, shawls, costumes, sheets and cardboard boxes filled with drawings. It looked as if everything had been sorted out for the inspection of an old clothes dealer.

Auguste, by nature independent and disinterested, withdrew before the intrusion of his cousins.

With Rodin, as with his wife, family sentiment by no means predominated. I remember that when I had read him a letter, on the occasion of his marriage, from a cousin who reminded him of their relationship, he turned round to his wife, who was still in bed, and said :

" I didn't know I had so many relations, Rose ! "

" At least," she replied, " you can say that my relations never asked you for anything : they're very different from yours ! "

But as a rule family letters were consigned to the waste-paper basket. Rodin used to talk only of his wife, and now and again of Auguste.

I had a good deal of annoyance in connection with M. Bénédite. For a yes or a no, I was threatened with Bénédite as if he were the Bogey Man and I a child.

" You know, Madame, M. Bénédite shall be told of this."

" Much I care for your Bénédite," I would reply in irritation. " I'm not his servant ; he has nothing to do with me."

Nothing mattered to me except that Rodin should be kept happy, and I did not conceal my anger if I saw he felt like an alien fenced in by an atmosphere foreign to him, forced to listen to futile babble and complaints about the lack of everything.

" There's never anything to eat now," he wailed, frightened by the stories of deprivation.

Then I would intervene and talk about the past, about his wife, about plenty and happiness ; and, once reassured, he would discuss art and artists, or else I would bring him some of his work to see if he recognized it. Alas ! that was not always the case.

" However ill he may be, he is a great artist," I insisted to M. Bénédite. " They do not understand his personality, and treat him as he ought to be treated, and it makes him very unhappy."

M. Bénédite would answer, in an indifferent tone, with a vague gesture :

" What can you expect ? "

Every morning I read letters to him, and he was delighted when I re-read more than once those from his friends.

" You must come every day and tell me I am happy," he insisted.

The nurse, a Russian political refugee, was about to become a mother, and she went away. M. Bénédite told me she had written an incompre-

hensible letter about me ; no doubt her condition had influenced it.

"Your devotion to Rodin leads you too far," said M. Peytel one day. "The family has no love for you ! "

"I am more trouble to M. Bénédite than to the family," I replied. "But I have promised Rodin not to leave him, and leave him I will not."

A new nurse arrived. She was very clean, very sharp-witted, but had a most detestable character. Two days after her arrival she was managing everything, taking charge of everything, and quarrelling with everybody. She admitted to me that she had her orders from M. Bénédite. She wrangled almost every day with Auguste, calling him a domestic, to which he retorted that she was a lick-spittle, while Nini lavished abuse on all and sundry.

I took pains to be pleasant to the nurse, for she looked after Rodin well, and I was grateful to her because she acted as if she understood that he was a great man. She used to try and flirt with my

husband ; but I shut my eyes to this, as it left me free to talk to Rodin for an hour while he was still in bed, trying to awaken his dormant intelligence. She used to be amused at the tales I invented to make him laugh.

All at once the two ladies of the wedding day, the second cousins, became very friendly with M. Bénédite ; so did the nurse. I pretended not to have noticed this change of attitude, but I watched over my poor Rodin the more closely, as I might have over my own father.

For a time things went on more or less well—rather less than more. On Sundays they would take Rodin to Paris for two hours to see M. Bénédite at the Hôtel Biron. And they almost always photographed him there, photographed him in company with members of the Institute, that Institute which had been, all his life, his mortal foe ! But poor Rodin was quite happy ! He looked as if he felt free. And when he got out of the hired carriage, and I welcomed him with a smile and asked him if he were pleased to have been in his

own house, he answered : " I've seen the Champs Elysées."

He used frequently to ask me for wine, which had been forbidden. But as they said he couldn't live through the winter, I could not see why they should deprive him of such a small pleasure, and when one day I bought him two bottles of Gaillac out of my own money, he was in raptures. Those around him only made him worse by their stupid and useless opposition in these trifles, not allowing him to eat this or drink that or go out when it was fine, preventing him from spending his days in his studio among the plaster studies he had so carefully kept moist. They would never talk of anything that interested him ; and they kept him away from his true friends whose devotion would have meant so much to him.

Madame Octave Mirbeau came one day, with Mademoiselle Carpentier of the opera. I received them. Madame Octave Mirbeau was so moved at the sight of Rodin that she only stayed five minutes ; his condition brought back to her

poignant memories of a similar case. I accompanied her to the door, and seeing her grief, said :

“ Mirbeau had you, Madame. But poor Rodin has no one. I? Yes; but they keep me away from him : I’m in the way ! ”

When I returned to Rodin, the cousin remarked : “ That Madame Mirbeau was an actress, I believe,” with such an air of disdain that I said to Rodin, not to her : “ In any case that actress was the means of saving a man of genius ; and without her, French literature would have lost one of its finest ornaments.”

“ That’s perfectly true,” Rodin replied, returning my steadfast look.

I was so accustomed to the changes in his expression that I could always tell when he was in a lucid interval. And it was dreadful to me to see his nearest relatives sometimes laughing at what he said without understanding that he “ was all there ” at the moment and understood them.

One afternoon Madame H. came to Meudon. I had known her as one of Rodin’s models, in

the days when we called her "Juliette." She had placed her mother at the Hôtel Biron as a servant, and it was she who in 1913 discovered the Rodin forgeries in England. It was a curious business, costing the sculptor a lot of money and bringing various casts to the Palais which Rodin did not recognize as forgeries. He agreed that my point of view was the right one, and withdrew the plaint he had lodged. He had sent for Montagutelli and had made him explain the matter at the Hôtel Biron. Montagutelli had pleaded his large family and then implored pardon for having sold a proof that Rodin had given him in payment. But he had been unable to give any information about the plaster studies or reproductions discovered in England. M. Paul Cruet had acted as detective in London for the matter, but Rodin let the matter drop, not even troubling to find out the explanation of it all. He simply withdrew his plaint and dismissed Cruet and his model Juliette, now Madame H.

When Madame H. arrived at Meudon,

the cousins rushed to receive her ; they, of course, knew nothing of the story. Mademoiselle Henriette took her round the garden, and they made her stay to dinner. I did not show myself. But I told M. Peytel about it the next Sunday : and he warned Mademoiselle Coltat that she must not receive people unknown to her ; it was better, he suggested, to consult me, as I knew who were Rodin's friends.

When the cousins learnt who it was they had welcomed so warmly, they were perturbed.

My anxieties and my suffering—for I really suffered in these days—brought on a nervous depression and I was obliged to keep in bed for some time. Rodin now and again asked after me but they gave him no answer. Only Auguste talked of me when his father asked how I was.

They wanted him to forget me altogether.

CHAPTER XVI

RODIN'S DEATH

ON April 25th, about nine o'clock in the morning, Rodin's two moulders, Paul Cruet and Georges Depeper, arrived at Meudon, accompanied by one of the custodians from the Luxembourg Museum. They had been summoned to act as witnesses to Rodin's signature of a deed brought by Maître Thérêt and M. Bénédite. As soon as the lawyer and M. Bénédite entered the house, the servant and the nurse went out. Various cousins, male and female, also arrived ; when they were told that the gentlemen had come, they also went out and walked about the road, waiting till the business was ended.

At ten o'clock the "witnesses," who had given their signatures upon oath, came out. At half-past eleven, Maître Thérêt and M. Bénédite came out in their turn, taking no notice of the family.

I was close to the door with Dora, Rodin's dog. I was not alone in noticing that the two gentlemen were rather embarrassed and ill at ease. I learnt a few minutes later that Rodin had just made his will.

From that day Rodin was shut up at Meudon with three women, who sat ceaselessly up to five o'clock in the evening with scarcely a word spoken between them.

Auguste called them "his Three Fates," they had so completely the air of drawing out with every thread the hours of the life of the old kinsman who was so long in dying. The two sisters were tall, thin women. When they were supporting the massively-built Rodin under the trees of the avenue in the garden of Les Brillants, he looked like his own "Creation" between two pillars. His body leaning to the left, his head drooping, his feet faltering—all gave the impression of the man worn out by overmuch creation.

Rodin took to his bed only five days before his death. I have already said how hard it was to get

coal that winter to keep the house warm, and all that could be procured did not suffice against the terrible cold. I have said how to my thinking the cold hastened Madame Rodin's death : and now Rodin himself seemed as though he would die from the same cause.

On November 2nd, 1917, it was proposed to take him to the South of France, but Dr. Chauvet found him so weak that he opposed the project strenuously, declaring that the Master would die before he got as far as Asnières. He had already asked if Rodin could be taken to the Hôtel Biron, which was well heated, but was told that this could not be arranged. Dr. Chauvet then demanded a furnished flat ; anywhere in Paris, he said, would do, provided Rodin could be kept warm and the third attack of congestion, which the doctor fore-saw, staved off. But this too was found impossible ; and the attack came.

For several days Rodin had not left his room, where he sat huddled up before a wretched fire. A ray of sunshine came through the window, and

his cousins took him out for a walk. They went too far, for the rain surprised them, and they brought back the poor Master hanging on their arms like a limp rag, his head on his chest, his body so bowed that his beard fell below his waist. They had to change his clothes in a fireless room. The poor old man was shaking in every limb. His face was very red ; from between his lips the breath came in a hoarse rattle.

Dr. Chauvet came again on the 13th. He was much upset and said what he thought. Then he gave instructions to the watchmen and went off, saying that he would come back some time on the 15th. He confided his fears to me.

The next day I went to see Rodin. He had been in a state of coma since the night before. He lay all crumpled up, his face hidden in the fold of his right arm, his eyes tightly closed. He breathed with difficulty.

On November 15th, he had not moved ; the nurse gave him a hypodermic injection, but he never stirred.

At nine o'clock arrived M. Bénédite, Maître Thérêt, and MM. Rudier and Eustache—the last-named was an architect in the Beaux-Arts—also M. Degenne, a superintendent of the Luxembourg Museum. They went into his room, with the object of drawing up—in all due form, so it appeared—a codicil to his will, by which he left his personal souvenirs, his portraits, and his decorations to the Rodin Museum, his early casts to the Trocadéro, his personal effects and furniture to his cousin. To his son he left his watch.

Furthermore he entrusted “anew,” and exclusively, to his friend M. Bénédite the task of sorting and publishing his writings and correspondence. He “thanked him once more” for all his disinterested devotion and put forward his name to the Ministry as curator, in succession to himself, of the Rodin Museum. Finally, he appointed M. Bénédite executor of his will.

While this codicil was being drawn up, Dr. Chauvet arrived. On her own responsibility, the nurse had just given Rodin another hypodermic

injection in the hope of awaking his dying senses. She ran to meet the doctor.

"You can't come in," she said. "M. Rodin has people with him : he has to sign some papers."

"I can't wait," retorted Dr. Chauvet : "my patient comes before everything. The people in there have only to come outside for a few minutes."

M. Eustache, the Beaux-Arts architect, came out to parley with him.

"We only want two minutes," he said. "The moment he has signed, you shall have your patient to yourself."

"I should be greatly surprised to think that Rodin could sign anything to-day," retorted Dr. Chauvet. "He was already in a state of complete coma yesterday."

Then M. Bénédite came out and joined in the conversation. Dr. Chauvet repeated what he had said to M. Eustache, that Rodin was incapable of dealing with business of any kind, and certainly not with a will.

Finally he went into the room, saw Rodin, noted that he was still in a state of coma, gave the necessary instructions, and came out.

"It's all over," he said to me. "He won't live through the night. I'll come back to-morrow."

Dr. Chauvet has told me since that he wrote that day, November 15th, 1917, to M. Clémentel : he told the Minister that Rodin was dying of congestion of the lungs, and denied all responsibility because his warnings had been disregarded.

We may suppose that the hypodermic injection made by the nurse when the witnesses entered the room had not much effect, for the lawyer had to add to the codicil this little clause : "M. Rodin, when questioned by the undersigned lawyer, declared that he wished to sign, but that he was unable to do so by reason of his excessive weakness." So the witnesses and the lawyer were the sole signatories.

By the evening of November 16th, Rodin was little more than a lifeless form : he had not moved. I went in to see him several times during the day. I kissed him, but there was no sign of recognition

on his calm noble face, half hidden in the fold of his right arm, as on the preceding days.

The night before, as it was impossible to move him, they had arranged a mechanism of rings and bands so as to be able to change his sheets without touching him.

Rodin uttered no word of complaint. He lay unconscious ; his eyes were still closed ; his breath came faint, painfully, from his chest.

Those around him were content : they had their codicil. But the cousins made a scene because M. Peytel had refused to hand me several thousand francs for the housekeeping expenses. This was at about eight o'clock in the evening ; M. Bénédite, the nurse, and Auguste were at the bedside.

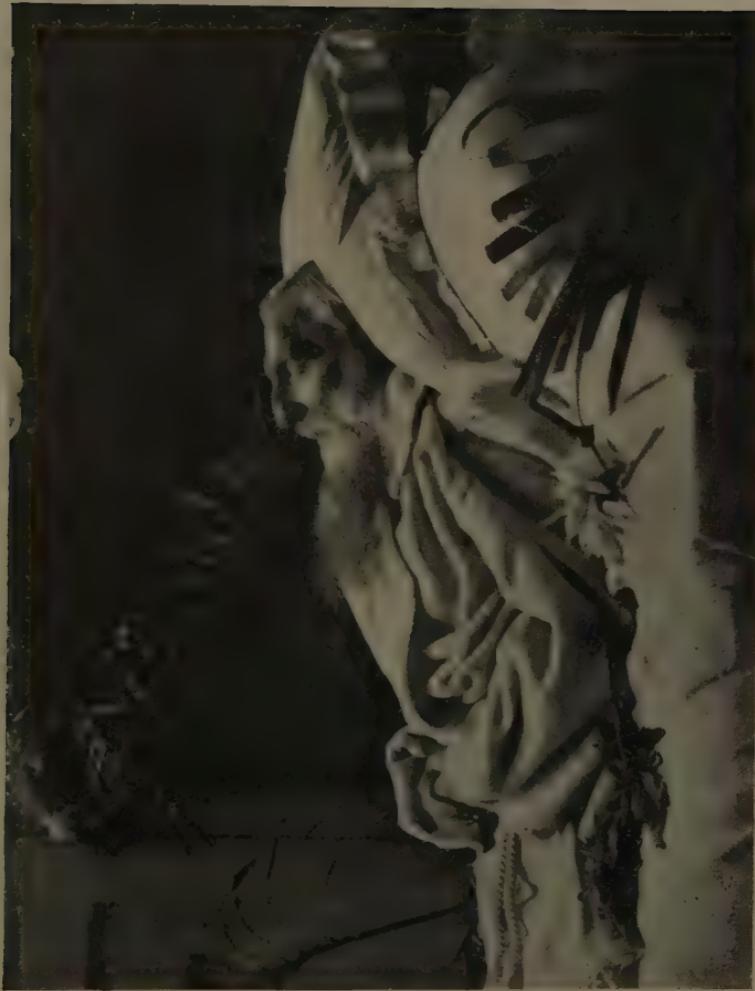
At four o'clock in the morning M. Bénédite came out and called Auguste, who was upstairs with me. Rodin had just died.

A quarter of an hour after, Auguste came upstairs again, and we wept together as though in very truth Rodin had been the father of us both.

I should have liked a great concourse of people

RODIN LYING IN STATE

[From a photograph in "Illustration" by J. Clair-Guyot.]



to pass in file before his body. Never was death more beautiful. Lying on his bed strewn with chrysanthemums of every colour, clad in his white monk's robe—that thought was Mademoiselle Cladel's—he looked like a statue of stone, noble beyond compare. When they laid the sculptured figure in a coffin lined with white satin and lace, I felt no more the horror of death.

“How beautiful ! how beautiful !” I said to Judith Cladel, who stood by weeping.

Many people called, but were not admitted. M. Bénédite had given definite orders, and he was not there to countermand them. Rodin's dearest friends were obliged to wait outside in the cold, amazed at such a reception.

The photographers raged and cursed ; and the man from the *Illustration* had a furious scene with M. Bénédite's servant. Madame X. came and kissed the hands of her dead friend.

On the morrow a fearful storm swept away the flowers and wreaths from the tomb watched over by the plaster effigy of the “ Thinker.”

A year later not a single flower lay on the tomb ; it was untended ; and through the windows, bare of glass, of the famous screen that Rodin had reconstructed faithfully from the great house of the counts of Issy—he had paid a hundred thousand francs for the materials—could be seen, as through a frame, the remains of a plaster study of the “Creation” : the rest had crumbled and been carried away by the wind.



